



PHD IN HISTORY THEORY AND SCIENCE

CYCLE XXXIII

*THE POLITICAL PARTY IN THE PARADIGM OF CRISIS. THE CASE OF THE
SOCIALIST TRADITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN SOUTHERN EUROPE.*

A COMPARATIVE STUDY.

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INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty and mistrust represent nowadays two constituent elements of our time. The feeling of living in a historical period in which significant events are often experienced with the surprise and concern typical of the unexpected is increasingly widespread. Contrary to some predictions made in the early 1990s, history does not seem to be over at all; on the contrary, we are witnessing structural changes of epochal proportions, which are, however, increasingly united by a widespread feeling of anxiety and concern about the future. Institutions that were once solid, and capable of representing a reference point in terms of stability over time, are described as being in a state of crisis. For more than twenty years now, there has been an exponential proliferation of studies and articles, in the field of social research and elsewhere, which sometimes describe the conditions of a crisis of democracy, others a crisis of representation and of the traditional actors of participation, and still others a crisis of public communication and citizenship. And the list could certainly go on. Already at the end of the 1980s, Ulrich Beck (1992) described with extreme clarity a context in which the characteristic structures of modernity were by now profoundly unstable. They had been consumed by a process of *reflexive modernisation* which, more due to the success of modernity than to its failure and slowdown, had now eroded the very foundations of modernity that had been imposed with the 'great transformation'. It could be said, without fear of contradiction, that the term crisis seems to be one of the terms today most widely used and diffused, if not sometimes abused and confused. It is, therefore, a consolidated symptomatology of what can be described as a critical juncture, i.e., one of those moments of history that Antonio Gramsci defined as *transitional phases*. These are moments in which pre-existing structures are no longer able to survive stably because of a relationship of hegemony but are forced into a corporative type of retreat based essentially on relationships of domination. In other words, these are phases in which, with the words of Gramsci, «the old-world dies. The new one is slow to appear». The dimension of crisis is presented as a structural rather than a conjunctural element and this research work intends to take the dimension of crisis

as a general paradigm. In other words, the aim is to consider the crisis not as an intervening variable, but as the general condition of the context in which established democracies find themselves operating in present times. Indeed, this seems to be the most suitable lens for observing the social-political consequences, and the transformations of the public sphere, in the digital age with the consequent transformations in the structure of the capitalist economy, as well as hopefully in the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic crisis.

The aim of this research work is to investigate, in a comparative key, the transformations of the parties of the socialist and social-democratic tradition and those of the so-called *new left* in southern Europe in terms of participation and communication processes in relation to two variables: the digital revolution and the pandemic crisis. What similarities and what contrasts can be seen between the closest heirs of the tradition of the mass integration party and those parties that have seen the digital as their main organizational and ideological resource? How do they interact with each other, do forms of mutual influence exist - or perhaps not - and, if so, what consequences have they brought about?

Political parties are undoubtedly among the most widely and extensively studied objects in the social sciences. While at first research focused mainly on the study of organisational dynamics, over time electoral studies and then new organisational studies emerged aimed at investigating, through the proposal of models and phases, the transformations of the political party in view of the decline of the model of mass integration after the Second World War (Reiter, 2006). More recently, what Nadia Urbinati (2011) has described as the end of a mode of being of the political party, sees in the progressive dismantling of what remains of its peripheral structures one of the distinctive features of the transformative trend underway. But at the same time, parties do not seem to be surmountable structures, since they are essential elements in the organisation of the representative process.

In this case the focus will be exclusively about the context of Southern Europe, with Great Britain assumed as a control variable, within the parties of the socialist and social-democratic tradition and on the parties of the so-called new-left, i.e. those parties-movements born in the wake of the consequences of the 2008-2009 economic crisis. In

this sense, the political parties under study will be the PS and the FI for France; the PD and the M5S for Italy; the PSOE and PODEMOS for Spain; the PS and the *Bloco de Esquerda* for Portugal. The case of Great Britain is taken as a control variable with reference to the Labour party and the Scottish National Party.

The reason behind this choice is the conviction that if the popular classes can exist politically to the extent that they manage to organise their demands in parties and if, in a democratic representative context, parties continue to play a role in the quality of democracy, then what happens within a party, the quality of its internal democracy, particularly for those parties that constitutionally cannot do without it, i.e. those parties that are supposed to represent those popular classes, is a decisive fact.

Internal conflict, in the case of parties that are in any case structured and not bound to the leader by proprietary logics, as are parties of the socialist or social democratic tradition, seems to be one of the main activities in *time-consuming* terms of the so-called *practitioners of politics*. By internal conflict one does not refer, in this case, to a struggle of ideas, but to a real and continuous fierce war between organised and extremely fluid factions that fight each other, almost as if they were autonomous parties within the same party, with the aim of grabbing shares of power and elected institutional offices. As Davis (2019) points out, this is a tendency which, if on the one hand has the effect of making it substantially impossible to proceed with transformative actions in the internal structures of the party, on the other hand contributes to inhibiting external political action and, consequently, to aggravating that furrow of distrust between parties and the popular classes which translates into a crisis of sentimental connection. This tendency to exacerbate internal conflict seems to have been taken up and declined in equally significant and, in some respects, even more violent forms by the parties of the so-called new left. It seems to have been progressively exacerbated in cases where these parties have been called upon to assume governmental responsibilities in their respective national governments. In some respects, the innovative drive, also linked to the digital dimension, that has characterised these parties seems to have been profoundly worn down, leaving room for a completely paralysing war between factions.

While the conflict between organised factions within political parties is not a new phenomenon, what is new seems to be the paralysing impact that this dynamic seems to have both in the parties of the socialist and social-democratic tradition, in some respects the closest heirs of the mass integration party, and in these parties of the so-called new-left which, while on the one hand seem to be facing an exhaustion of their propulsive thrust, on the other hand seem to be the victims of an evil common to the aforementioned parties of the socialist tradition. The internal conflict does not seem, therefore, to be organised on the basis of ideological fragmentation, but rather on the basis of a fragmentation of power that seems to configure a sort of 'party-lobby' that confederates under a single label various autonomous realities, deeply separate and in some respects tribal. The central element that distinguishes these factions is represented by the individual destiny of an extraordinarily fluid party elite, which goes through changes in leadership rather indifferently or almost indifferently, but always in a state of permanent war for positions and roles.

This internal dimension of the parties mentioned above will be treated in relation to two intervening variables, represented respectively by the digital dimension and by the covid-19 pandemic crisis. Rather like what happened over a century ago with the industrial revolution, the digital revolution is the ground on which the structure of the capitalist economy is being redefined. Digital processes and Capitalism are now two dimensions totally interconnected, and they are so interconnected that it is difficult even to imagine them as separate entities. It follows that the digital represents a decisive space in which the social contradictions and conflicts, that help define the political superstructure of contemporary societies, are defined and structured on new bases. In other words, the digital is the space of the struggle for hegemony in our time and is therefore the terrain on which parties of socialist and progressive inspiration must measure themselves in order to reknit the threads of that sentimental connection with the popular classes that now seems to have been in crisis for some time. Finally, with regard to the communicative dynamics of parties and, more generally, of politics, the digital world has represented a decisive transformative element that has made it necessary, as suggested by many scholars, to conceptualise a fourth phase of media studies characterised by a public

sphere (post-public sphere) that is increasingly fragmented into increasingly polarised *echo chambers*.

Secondly, the current pandemic crisis is the most significant global event since the end of the Second World War and has put back at the centre of collective attention something that in consolidated democracies had progressively lost its relevance, namely the centrality of one of the main materialistic values: that about health. On the one hand, the state seems to have regained a certain centrality, both in terms of the importance and impact of the choices made to safeguard the health of citizens, and because, with the disappearance of the stringent budgetary constraints that had marked the recent past, the high level of public spending has given the state economic policy significant opportunities for action. Precisely in this sense, some early studies on the emergency management phase seem to show a relative increase in public confidence in institutions, governments and science. However, on the other hand, the pandemic emergency has contributed to accelerating and accentuating those imposing concentrations of power and inequalities connected to the expansion of digital capitalism and the process of the *platformisation of society*.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

From the point of view of the methodology used, a qualitative approach was adopted. A frame analysis process was used to examine official documents, the statutes of the individual parties, congress rules and internal functioning agreements, as well as the decisions of the control commissions, where available. The dimension of internal conflict was then further explored by interviewing some of the main actors identified as significant in relation to the dimension covered by this research.

CHAPTER 1.

THE CRISIS AS A PARADIGM

INTRODUCTION

In the field of social research in recent years, the word *crisis* could easily be described as one of the words most used and at the same time abused, if not confused. The extraordinary abundance of research in a wide variety of fields openly referring to the dimension of crisis or describing a state of affairs as being in crisis can offer a first outline of the contextual framework of the time in which we live. It is a time of transformation and transition where instability and precariousness seem to prevail over any form of stability and durability. And this phenomenon seems to be accompanied by the growing difficulty of imagining future scenarios with a reasonable degree of precision. In other words, we could say that this is a time marked by a dimension of crisis as a paradigmatic factor.

If, on the one hand, the concept of crisis has taken on great centrality in the debate on social sciences, on the other hand, it is precisely the considerable heterogeneity and complexity it entails that makes particularly difficult the task of identifying a univocal definition of the concept of crisis. Before proceeding to take the crisis as an independent variable and context for this research, it is therefore appropriate to briefly review some of the main references in the literature.

In the vast range of meanings that the notion of crisis can take on, it is possible to recognise a common logical-argumentative structure, that is "the description of a processuality in which a threshold is identified beyond which a qualitative change in the same processuality is discovered" (Leonardi 1986, 173). In this sense, both the processual nature of the concept of crisis and its connotation of passage outlines a transition in which there are clear and evident signs that what was is no longer the case and what is yet to be is not entirely clear. In other words, the processual nature of the concept of crisis is linked both to a dimension of unpredictability and uncertainty, and to some extent to a dimension of innovation which, by coming into contact with social structures, from the

outside or the inside as the case may be, contributes to determining an imbalance in these structures.

In order to better understand the procedural dimension of the concept of crisis, it may be useful to dwell briefly on the notion of conflict and the main conceptual differences between it and the notion of crisis. From a sociological point of view, in fact, if the notion of conflict refers to a dialectic of opposition between two or more individual or collective subjects, the notion of crisis refers to a more complex situation in which an unexpected event, or in any case one that is not entirely foreseen, contributes to generating a state of imbalance and uncertainty.

While this is certainly not the appropriate place for an in-depth examination of the historical evolution of the concept of crisis, it may be useful to focus on some of the fundamental passages concerning the "fortune" and diffusion of the concept of crisis in the main historical, economic and political studies that have followed one another since, in particular, the second half of the XIX century.

THE CONCEPT OF CRISIS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

It is mainly thanks to the studies of Karl Marx that the notion of crisis takes on the significance of a profound turning point towards a perspective of renewal of the given conditions. This is not the place for an in-depth examination of Marx's theory of crisis, but it is certainly useful to recall some fundamental passages from Book III of *The Capital*. In this work, to which Friedrich Engels' contribution of revision should be mentioned, two causes of the decline in the profit rate can be identified. On the one hand, the increase in the organic composition of capital that is not compensated for by the rate of surplus value, and on the other, overproduction, i.e. the inability of the capitalist class to sell the goods produced. Both of the above-mentioned causes can be traced back to three possible systemic crises: the crisis as a *tendential fall in the profit rate*; as *anarchy of production*; as *under-consumption or over-production*. The crisis, in a broad sense, thus appears as an intrinsic feature of the capitalist mode of production characterised by cycles of expansion and contraction of the production and consumption of capital.

The debate promoted by the journal *Annals d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, founded in 1929 by March Bloch and Lucien Febvre, led to the publication of numerous articles, and thus to a deep interest, in the economic crises that have followed one another in the course of history. Particular attention is paid to the crisis of the late Middle Ages (Abel, 1976), which is described as a historical phase characterised by the convergence of two profound systemic crises: the first an agrarian crisis, the second a demographic crisis. A few years later, in another important historical review, *Past and Present*, Eric J. Hobsbawm, reflecting on another great crisis, that of the seventeenth century, stated that in "the seventeenth century the European economy went through a "general crisis" that marked the last phase of the transition from the feudal system to the capitalist system". In the case of the British scholar, we find a notion of crisis borrowed more from Gramscian thought which, as we will see later, is closely related to the conceptualisation of transitional phases as critical junctures in history moments of explosion of contradictions in social relations and class relations. Still in the field of history, in what can rightly be defined as one of the most significant works of the first half of the last century, namely the twelve-volume "*a Study of History*", Arnold J. Toynbee, analysing the causes of the rise and fall of civilisations in the course of human history, underlines how "civilisations are born and develop as they successfully respond to successive challenges. They break and fall if and when they are challenged by a challenge they cannot meet" (1949, 79). What the English scholar defines as *breakdown is nothing more than the* consequence of an unrecoverable and irreversible failure in the management, by the political-economic elites, of a systemic crisis. These narrow oligarchies from "creative minorities" are transformed, by attrition and through a process of internal crisis, into a "dominant minority" which, while maintaining its role of political and economic leadership, loses the cultural hegemony exercised over society. And this happens in favour of a closure that is increasingly self-referential and deaf to the contradictions and changes that occur, in parallel, in society. Moments similar to those recalled in the study promoted by Toynbee can be found in Durkheim's conceptualisation of '*collective enthusiasms*', Freud's '*dionysiac moments*' and Lenin's '*revolutionary situations*'.¹

¹ See Belligni 2003, p. 264

The concept of crisis is then developed, with great and particular attention, in the work of Antonio Gramsci under a profile that is certainly less economicist than the one of the Marxist tradition, but certainly not less relevant in terms of impact with respect to its importance for the development of the social sciences. The notion of crisis is declined in Gramsci as a concept of "organic crisis" to be understood as a process of shattering of the relationship of trust between representatives and the represented that leads, through a dialectical and conflictual path, to a consequent unbalance that in turn triggers the mobilisation of new social forces that organise themselves to determine the conditions for a new equilibrium. In other words, it is a process of fragmentation and realignment that organises historical transformations from social and cultural perspective. In the reflections that can be found in the "*quaderni dal carcere*", the concept of crisis can be found linked, in a clear and in some ways indissoluble way, to the reflection on what Gramsci defines as "*transitional phases*". With this definition Gramsci, according to his thought, refers to phase that can be identified as critical junctures. In other words, these are historical moments of interregnum that are characterised by the decline of the hegemonic ideologies that governed the previous historical phases and, at the same time, by the impossibility that new ideologies can replace them in a new organic relationship of hegemony. It is well known that the example promoted by Gramsci to better describe this process was the one of the European crisis of the age of the Communes. The latter represents a long transitional phase in which the evident loss of hegemony of imperial power was followed by the strengthening of the autonomous force of the communes, which, in Gramsci's lexicon, can be described as a corporative transformation, or rather a retreat of particular interests to the level of individual territorial communities. The communes of the late Middle Ages, due to the loss of the hegemonic moment of the Empire's temporal power structure, which at the time could be compared in some respects to the State dimension, came into conflict with it and the latter was forced, in order to maintain the relationship of domination, to take numerous steps that took the form of repressive use of military force. The crisis needs in this sense also to be understood as a situation of opportunity for changes, and this to the extent that it is precisely within the transitional phases that the conditions for a new and different definition of social and political power relations arise. In this sense, and still following the historical case mentioned above, the failure of the "*descents into Italy*" of the imperial

armies to subdue the communal autonomy, also due to the ability of the latter to make a common front and resort to a "mass" recruitment of the militia², determined the opportunity for the consolidation of the communal autonomy.

In other words, the general context of the political sphere in a crisis is characterised by the retreat of the state into an economic-corporative dimension in which the power of the dominant classes over the subordinate ones is increasingly based on relations of domination that can result in the use of violence and less and less on relations of consensus. Moreover, a second feature sees the purely economic dimension tending to prevail over the ethical-political one. This relationship, which can only be dialectical based, thus becomes structurally unstable precisely because of the loss of hegemonic capacity of the rulers over the ruled. And this happens, again according to Gramsci, since the conduct of the former is flattened on the most immediate economic moment and the legitimation of their own action must resort essentially to the dimension of force and the capacity for coercion rather than the hegemonic capacity for consensus. From this perspective, the power exercised by the ruling classes is guaranteed more by the inertia of the role already acquired than by a dynamic capacity for perspective. In other words, the crisis is the rupture between the economic moment and the hegemonic moment that disarticulates the constituted balance of power relations, both from social and political perspective.

If, on the one hand, theories that can be traced back in some way to the Marxist or post-Marxist strand of thought have always tackled the question of complexity and have deepened and emphasised the role of culture as a structural dimension of social relations, functionalist theories have often declined, and in some ways dismissed, the dimension of the crisis as a phenomenon attributable to a social dysfunction. In other words, It is an incorrect functioning of the procedures and mechanisms of social integration, an irrational irruption which, in the vast majority of cases, would not have determined risks for the survival of the system itself since its latent forces of self-preservation would have

² The reference here is to the defeat of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa at the Battle of Legnano in May 1176. One of the salient elements of this battle was that the population in arms came out of the city walls to confront the imperial army. This was an innovation in the way conflicts were dealt with. In the Middle Ages, war was a matter for the noblemen of the blood, who armed themselves and their retinues at their own expense and put them at the disposal of the sovereign's campaigns.

intervened to rebalance it (Parsons, 1965). This is a reflection, the one matured in Parsons' studies, in which, although there is ample space for an in-depth discussion on social change that is declined through slow changes *in the* system, it struggles to find space for the more radical possibility of system changes, which are better ascribable to the consequences of the crisis or to the crisis dimension itself. Jurgen Habermas (1975), for his part, speaks of the crisis of rationality as a "transferred system crisis which, like the economic crisis, expresses the contradiction of production as a contradiction of control imperatives".

CRISIS OF MODERNITY

Particular attention must also be paid to all those studies on the crisis of modernity and the ensuing debate. Specifically, this refers to the theories on the so-called 'second modernity' or 'advanced modernity' or more precisely 'post-modernity'. The very term post-modern is already strongly evocative of the inherent precariousness of the notion itself. From a semantic point of view, the prefix *post* evokes a sort of paradox when juxtaposed to the concept of modernity. If on the one hand it recalls an overcoming of the main characteristics of a phase of the capitalist economy, which is now increasingly different from its recent past, on the other hand it clearly represents a situation of indeterminacy with respect to possible prospects. In other words, the very word post-modern already semantically recalls a transitional dimension whose precise outcomes are marked by a high degree of uncertainty and precariousness. The context in which these studies have been carried out is characterised by processes of profound ideological transformation and by an ever-increasing flexibility in the possibilities of capital accumulation, as well as by a spotty spread of policies aimed at deregulating the economic dimension to the detriment of welfare state systems. These phenomena combine to reinforce the feelings of fear, uncertainty and distrust already widespread in society. In other words, feelings of anxiety and fear for the future are gradually taking root in a society that is increasingly fragmented and divided between optimism over technological progress on the one hand, and the new risks and consequent contradictions of a

globalised and increasingly individualised world on the other. This is the context in which the deep-rooted and profound feeling of the crisis is affirmed, understood as a moment of transformation of capitalism and, more generally, as a real constant of the last quarter of the last century.

In the mid-1980s, Ulrich Beck described the prefix post as 'the key word of our times', and on the basis of this observation he analysed, through a profoundly multidisciplinary approach, the main elements of what could be described as a *crisis of modernity*, but which is in fact a transformation caused by its own success. The enormous spread of the prefix post in practically every field of the social sciences was in itself sufficient to call into question one of the myths of modernity, namely that we had now arrived at a fully modern society, destined to continue on a bright path of progress, structurally equal to itself, in which mere historical contingencies were transformed into real and indeformable necessities. The initial question posed by Beck can be summarised, therefore, as an attempt to understand and conceptualise, from a sociological point of view, the insecurities of the spirit of his time and in a context in which the emerging contradictions could no longer be explained through traditional categories. It is precisely in this sense that he states that «in the same way that modernisation in the nineteenth century dissolved the structures of feudal society and produced industrial society, today modernisation is destroying industrial society and a new kind of modernity is emerging» (Beck 1992: 10). In other words, and in a similar way to what had happened almost a century earlier in what Karl Polanyi had called 'the *great transformation*', where modernity had imposed itself on the institutions and values of tradition and had laid the foundations of industrial society, the basic structures of modernity were beginning to break down. In this sense, the conditions for a crisis of modernity itself became explicit, which, again following Beck's analysis, determined the transition from industrial society to what is defined as the '(industrial) society of risk'. And if the 'great transformation' saw the imposition of the modernisation process in a context that could be, in many ways, defined as its opposite, i.e. the traditional one, the crisis of modernity is configured as a consumption that took place through wear and tear and a failure of its very foundations. The process of modernisation '*within the path of industrial society* is replaced by a modernisation *of the principles of industrial society*' (ibid.). It is a process that is described

as a *reflexive modernisation*. And this undermining of modernity and its fundamental characteristics occurs as a result of the modernisation process itself and not, as one might think, through 'system explosions' following disruptive elections or revolutions. The process of '*reflexive modernisation*' in some ways confronts and attempts to reconcile the constant tension between human indeterminacy and the inevitable tendency to make our common institutional or cultural productions objective, natural and immutable. It is, in other words, a model for interpreting social change based primarily on a process of learning from reality.

In this sense, risk is defined as 'the probability of suffering physical harm due to a given technological or other process' (ibid.: 4). A definition that already includes in itself one of the possible reasons for the subsequent and pervasive phenomenon known as *professionalisation*. A phenomenon that is spreading more and more, both in the field of politics and beyond. And this happens precisely because, more and more often, technical figures are delegated to manage the agenda as much on the risk itself and its possible consequences as on those activities that could generalise it. If risk becomes a constant to be reckoned with, then it was necessary to have recourse to figures specialised in its management and containment. The centrality that the notion of risk assumes represents one of the elements of substantial discontinuity between the modern dimension and the later notion of *reflexive modernisation* proposed by Beck. Of course, risk is nothing new, but while modernity had seen the concept of risk replace, in some respects, the role occupied by the notions of fate and destiny, which had characterised the pre-modern context, in industrial society it was the logic of wealth distribution that prevailed over the logic of risk distribution. In other words, the concerns and fears structurally linked to the notion of risk were mitigated by the prevalence of an optimistic perception linked to the distribution of wealth, resulting from the great and very rapid development of industrial societies. On the contrary, in the postmodern context, this relationship is inverted, and the fears, anxieties and instability linked to the very large-scale diffusion of new and uncontrolled risks begin to take over and spread as the dominant logic.

CRISIS AND TRUST

A society in which the logic of risk distribution prevails over that of wealth distribution is a society in which new social concerns take over in a climate of increasing precariousness and imbalance. In other words, the new modernity associates more and more with the new discoveries of technology and the most recent developments in industrial society, the notion of *risk* and, less and less, the more optimistic notion of *progress*. It is in this sense that the risk society is configured as a society of distrust. Clearly, as is widely acknowledged, distrust can certainly not be described as a new phenomenon, quite the contrary. The very institutional and social structures of modern democracies derive, in many ways, from the desire to organise mistrust, to give it tools so that it does not degenerate into unconditional fear. With regard to the relationship between political institutions and mistrust, it is interesting here to briefly recall two of the main possible approaches, elaborated by Pierre Rosanvallon, and historically found: the liberal approach and the democratic one.

The former, in his proposal of a weak government that leaves the field open to the logic of self-regulation of the economy, has always posed the problem of protecting the individual from the arbitrary power came from the authority. This need must certainly be contextualised historically, i.e. in that transition to modernity from tradition, with particular regard to those contexts in which the end of the ancient regime came about as a consequence of violent or revolutionary processes. And this is understandable in the sense that, in addition to the already mentioned dimension of protection from authoritarian powers, there is also a certain diffidence towards the possible excesses of popular government. In other words, it is "a cautious and pessimistic perspective of democracy. In this case, distrust takes the form of suspicion of popular power, fear of its errors, reticence in the face of the establishment of universal suffrage" (Rosanvallon, 2012: 13).

The second perspective, the democratic one, proposes, on the other hand, to organise distrust so that the institutions and their representatives remain faithful to their commitments beyond the promotion -or possible sanction- linked to the electoral moment. It is in this dimension that the contours of what the French scholar has defined as a counter-democracy can be found, i.e. the "democracy of organised distrust" which contrasts with the "democracy of electoral legitimacy". In this theorisation there are three

factors that can explain the progressive structural dimension that distrust tends to assume in contemporary advanced industrial societies. The first is of a scientific order and concerns the breakdown of the constant optimism towards all kinds of technological development and towards professional and specialised apparatuses, which, although in many ways now indispensable, are increasingly less perceived as reliable. Therefore, attempts and demands for greater control over their work tend to multiply. The second is economic and concerns the growing mistrust that makes it increasingly difficult to produce reliable economic forecasts. The lack of trust contributes to making the economic dimension increasingly unstable, because of its functional structure bases many of its relations on trust between individual actors or between actors and regulatory institutions. Finally, the third is sociological and concerns the processes of individualisation and what, more generally, could be described using the formula proposed by Michel Walzer, i.e. the '*society of exclusion*'. This is a society in which interpersonal relationships of trust are gradually crumbling and, at the same time, relationships of trust within institutions, particularly political ones, are increasingly eroded. The correlation between the two phenomena before mentioned is widely observed and studied. Surveillance, interdiction and judgement are therefore the three dimensions that the counter-democratic phenomenon can take on. These are real structural forms of mistrust that refer, respectively, to a progressive obsession with permanent control; to the multiplication of forms of interdiction as more widespread political actions such as to give rise to a sort of '*negative social sovereignty*', which is facilitated by the strategic advantage of coalitions of interdiction over those of a proactive nature; and to the increasing presence of the judicial sphere in the political sphere. In all these possible translations of mistrust there is a further point of convergence that lies in the temporal dimension of the effects produced by the actions or behaviours mentioned above. In fact, it is a matter of behaviours that have in common the characteristic of offering an immediate feedback that takes shape clearly and, above all, is difficult to reverse. The most striking case, in this sense, can be found in the increasingly widespread use of the scandalous or courtroom dimension in the political sphere. In fact, politics is an activity that finds in the electoral moment the possibility of the democratic sanction of non-re-election, or rather of non-renewal of the trust previously granted to elected representatives. However, more and more often, scandals of a personal nature, such as divorces or open betrayals, or the simple

notification of precautionary notices of legal proceedings against them, constitute effective instruments for immediate removal. This is a very rapid mechanism which, thanks also to the highly emotional nature to which such facts can be traced from a media point of view, produces a tangible consequential effect: resignation.

THE CONCEPT OF CRISIS IN MEDIA STUDIES

In an article published in the mid-1990s, in 1995 to be precise, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, reflecting on public communication, spoke explicitly of a crisis, or rather identified the symptoms of a crisis in '*communication for citizenship*'. From their point of view, the causes were to be found in what was happening at the level of the main players in the political communication system. The context was mainly constituted by an increasing professionalisation of communication management in the political sphere and by a certain degree of regulatory uncertainty regarding the role of political advertising. On the basis of these premises, six causes contributing to the crisis situation were identified in detail³ and a theoretical model based of different phases of media studies was described.

The first phase, which historically can be traced back to the twenty years after the end of the Second World War, is represented by a sort of golden age of political parties

³. a degree of de-politicisation, due to the centre-stage movement of politically independent media into the political process, encouraging an incursion of media personalities into politics;
· dissemination of an over-supply of oxygen for cynicism;
· projection of a highly pejorative, over-simplified and in many cases probably unfair stereotype of the standard politician as someone who cares only for power and personal advancement;
· that less and less of the political communication diet serves the citizen role-two to a predominant presentation of politics as a game (at the expense of coverage of policy issues) and the provision of ever-shorter soundbites;
· the catapulting of the press into a position of surrogate opposition, imbuing much reporting with qualities of challenge, criticism and exposure at the expense of giving credit where it is due;
· the emergence of a "chronic state of partial war" between politicians and journalists'. (Blumler, J. 2018: 84-85)

and press. The relationship between citizens and representative institutions was very solid and the political parties organised in bureaucratic structures of mass integration. The press was either party press or at least a press that showed a high degree of deference to political power in general. The resulting political diet was, therefore, rather poor and borrowed from an essentially ideologically based fragmentation.

The second phase, between the 1960s and the 1990s, can be traced back to the advent and spread of cable TV with limited channels. Although it is still possible to detect, especially at the beginning of the above-mentioned periodisation, a strong presence and directing role of political power on television, that was mainly under public control. But apart from that, the degree of information available tends to increase progressively and contributes to reducing the role and diffusion of the party press.

The third phase is finally characterised by the spread of multi-channel television broadcasting around the clock. One of the fundamental trends summarising this third phase is represented first and foremost by an increasingly widespread abundance of communication. And it is precisely this abundance that brings about profound changes, starting with the ever-increasing attention paid by the political sphere to the communication dimension and the ever-increasing professionalisation in its management. A centrality that can be well described by recalling the transition of the central symbolic figure of the political system, i.e. in the passage from the centrality of the '*party bureaucrat*' to the centrality of the '*media expert*' (Manin, 1997).

In the following quarter of a century, the media ecosystem has changed dramatically, and some of these changes have contributed to increasing the situation described above, in which the symptoms of an ongoing crisis were already identified. And if some trends seem to be in continuity with what has already been studied with respect to the third phase of media studies, as in the case of the trend of communicative abundance, for example, what has happened at the level of the tools that people can use, and the places where these can be used to obtain or receive information, is something of epochal and revolutionary character. In other words, the changes that have taken place at the level of communication technologies, following the irruption of the digital age, have determined the conditions for a real '*change of species*' that has called into question many of the

consolidated studies on the media, on political communication, and on the transformations of the public sphere. This is a process of such magnitude as to determine a real bifurcation of the communication ecosystem. On the one hand, a *mainstream* elite communication is developing, and on the other, a *grassroots* mass communication (Blumler, 2018) in a context of progressive incommunicability between these two dimensions. The change described above is not only and simply about the consequences and scope of the digital itself, but also about the numerous and in many ways structural transformations that can be traced at the level of contemporary society.

And it is precisely these profound transformations that contribute to defining the context of Blumler's 2013 critique (which can also be read, in some respects, as a self-criticism of his own work) in which he called for the need for a new and fourth phase of media studies that would question some of the fundamental assumptions of a system no longer fully able to explain the changes of the present. The dynamics of this fourth phase, which now seems to be fully mature, are to be considered as closely linked first and foremost to the context of the crisis of representative democracy (Davis, 2019). The reference, in this case, is twofold. Firstly, it is addressed to the characteristics of what Colin Crouch had defined at the beginning of the 21st century as "*postdemocracy*": a set of characteristics that over the last twenty years seem to have asserted themselves in ways and at speeds even more pessimistic than those originally described by Crouch⁴ himself. Secondly, the reference is to the dimension of the *crisis of citizenship* (Blumler, 2018) described in turn as the outcome of a more general crisis of *public communication*.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

What has emerged is thus a radically different situation that is difficult to represent in the traditional image of a public sphere that is in principle inclusive and basically well-functioning (Pfetsch, 2016). On the contrary, we have been facing profound changes and

⁴ As he himself acknowledged in a later volume "fighting post-democracy" (Crouch, 2019)

transformations of the traditional Habermasian notion of the public sphere for some time now. And these go in the direction of its increasing fragmentation and polarisation, together with the increasingly widespread and pervasive presence of *echo chambers* phenomena. The consequences of the fragmentation processes, which in many ways are linked to the characteristics of the internet era, contribute to accelerating the profound transformation underway in the *legacy media* and to determining the conditions for an evolution of the concept of the public sphere within the paradigm of crisis.

The concept of the public sphere is a central concept in communication studies and, more generally, in the field of media studies and concerns "the discursive process through which the beliefs of public opinion are produced and legitimised: the public sphere, in essence, primarily concerns the communicative processes underlying the construction of opinion" (Sorice, 2020). In other words, it is a spatial metaphor that sums up the complex sphere of relations between citizens, institutions and the various actors operating in the political sphere. In other words, the public sphere can only be defined in terms of power relations. And, consequently, its conceptual revisions consist in understanding and describing the balance that, from time to time, is reached between the fundamental economic, political and cultural relations that occur in a given historical context and taking into account the available communication technologies.

In 2008, when many of the structural effects related to the digital revolution and communication technologies were still only partly visible, Hannu Nieminen pointed to an ongoing process that he described as a *dilution of* the public sphere. The background premise is represented by the processes of differentiation which, as is well known, are a feature of modern Western democracies and on the basis of which the vast majority of the main activities of modern societies can be traced back to a breakdown into three main dimensions: the social dimension, the political dimension, and the economic dimension. Each of these dimensions has its own logic of operation and, in the event of an unregulated or uncontrolled imbalance of one dimension over the others, potentially self-destructive mechanisms can occur.

Social Area: Culture, communality	Political Area: State, political activity	Economic Area: Economy, markets
Cultural public sphere	Political Public Sphere	Economic Public Sphere
Individual, Intimacy, human relations	Citizen, civic activity	Consumer, household economy

"The Dilution of Public Sphere" (Nieminem, 2008: 73)

The process of *dilution of the public sphere* can thus be described as the tendency of the political sphere to be diluted both in relation to the social sphere and - above all - in relation to the economic sphere. In other words, the political sphere loses its autonomy and its logic of functioning is confused and distorted. This is essentially due to two mechanisms: on the one hand, the process of *mediatisation* and, on the other, the *progressive expansion of the economic dimension*.

The *process of mediatisation* can be defined in relation to the increasingly central role that the media have assumed in people's daily lives. They act as the main mediating agents between individuals and their possibilities of coming into contact with the main aspects of social life. In other words, the perception that people acquire with respect to a given event or phenomenon derives, to a large extent, from the ways in which this information has been conveyed and presented by the media themselves, which, therefore, perform the function of mediation with respect to all the three areas of the differentiation process mentioned above. (Dahlgren, 2004).

The *process of expansion of the economic dimension*, on the other hand, concerns the increasingly widespread tendency of the economic to hegemonise the political, with precise consequences in terms of the perception of political issues. In fact, the political dimension is defined by operating logics that are by their nature structurally conflictual. Because of these conflicts, actions are coordinated on the basis of ideological choices and the resulting priorities of the political agenda are defined from time to time. In this respect, two dynamics that tend to develop simultaneously can be described. Firstly, the

expansion of the economic dimension takes place to the detriment of the political dimension and tends to reduce the multiplicity of possible political alternatives, which are supported by different conflicting interests, to a single possible choice that does not admit alternatives since it is supported by economic reasons, thus based on a sort of 'exact science'. Secondly, as political decision-making shifts from representative institutions and the circle of political elites to that of economic elites ones, it becomes increasingly difficult for political personnel to differentiate themselves on the basis of a different political-ideological offer. This is essentially because the power to decide how to organise the agenda and how to allocate resources has shifted elsewhere. But the political personnel continue to exist formally and to perform functions that cannot be formally delegated and must be elected through mechanisms and processes that are in any case based on forms of consensus. In order to distinguish itself in a context where it is now clear that many of the promises made cannot be followed by deeds, the political struggle tends to be increasingly characterised by the irruption of non-political arguments. It is precisely in this sense that the increasingly widespread tendency to use issues of a private nature in political discourse can be framed, in a process which, when encountered through the media, takes on the characteristics of a *spectacularization* of politics.

Today, although the process of *diluting* the public sphere is an undeniable and present trend, it no longer seems sufficient to explain the extent and radicality of the transformations taking place. In fact, we are now faced with a process of real fragmentation that makes a double level of the ecology of political communication evident: on the one hand, a level of the elites, and on the other, that of the masses. (Blumler, 2013) And it is in this context, and in connection with the dimension of the crisis, that the conditions have developed for a more pronounced revision of the concept of the public sphere towards what can be defined as the *post-public sphere* (Davis 2019, Schlesinger 2020, Sorice 2020).

THE POST-PUBLIC SPHERE.

The pre-digital media ecosystem has given way to a transitional dimension in which, as already argued above, the prefix *post* associated with the concept of public sphere already recalls aspects of precariousness and instability as well as the absence of a precise normative dimension. In this sense, unlike the classical notion of the public sphere, which saw national borders as a structural element, the current transformations can only be framed within a global competitive context, which can only be better defined by taking into account the structural conditions, and consequent contradictions, that are characteristic of the transformations of digital capitalism (Schlesinger, 2020). The context within which the conditions for the emergence of the post-public sphere develop is represented by the contextual and interconnected development of three main dynamics.

- a) The *post-representative* dynamics linked to the crisis of traditional intermediate bodies and the increasingly widespread, and partly consequent, distrust in the traditional institutions of representation. In this sense, due consideration should be given to the role that digital communication ecosystems have played and continue to play in reinforcing narratives referable to forms of direct democracy on the one hand, and in offering tools and techniques for occasional participation practices on the other.
- b) The development and consolidation of post-political dynamics ascribable to a dimension of depoliticisation can essentially be summarised in the progressive shift from the idea of *government* to that of *governance* (Hay, 2007). In this case, it is not a "mere rejection of political institutions and intermediate bodies, but is configured as a means of facilitating the reduction of the political to the economic dimension" (Sorice, 2020: 375).
- c) The progressive affirmation of *post-democratic* dynamics (Crouch 2003) marked by mechanisms of *commodification* of citizenship in relation to which the spread of the populist phenomenon, and the pervasiveness of its rhetoric, far from being interpreted in any way as a form of 'antidote' or positive response to post-democracy, represents, on the contrary, a negative extreme of it and, therefore,

constitutes a threat to representative democracy as well as a factor of intensification and acceleration of its crisis (Crouch, 2019).

With regard to this last point, it is important to stress the importance of the relationship established between populism and political communication, which is a structural feature of the current post-democratic phase of capitalism.

Populist rhetoric tends, in fact, to present political reality as a binary relationship that can be summed up in the binomial *we-they*. In this case, the '*we*' defines an exclusive community that can be ascribed within the boundaries of the populist movement, which therefore represents 'the people', or rather the only group legitimised to define itself as such. This automatically determines the exclusion of anyone who is not part of this '*we*' from the very notion of people. In other words, it is the extremisation of a friend-enemy dialectic that admits no exceptions and cannot consider the *other* as part of the same shared community. On the contrary, it degrades everyone outside the community of the *people* as part of an indistinct *non-people*. It is, in other words, an authoritarian way of conceiving political relations that *a priori* excludes anyone who is not part of their group from the right to enjoy the same rights, the same respect that comes with sharing a common space. This process makes the survival of a shared communicative space increasingly fragile, and contributes to facilitating both its progressive fragmentation and the progressive incommunicability between the various fragments that are formed in a relationship that cannot but be strongly polarising.

Moreover, the populist style (Moffit, 2016), by establishing a strongly disintermediated and vertical relationship between the leader and the mass of his followers, tends to emphasise the more purely emotional dimension of the public sphere (De Blasio and Selva 2019). This is a process that contributes to undermining and weakening more and more that sentimental connection between intermediate bodies and citizenship, which, moreover, is already severely in crisis, and which constitutes a fundamental building block for the proper functioning of representative democracy.

Finally, it should be mentioned that populist rhetoric, precisely because of its intrinsic radicality, tends to transform the very notion of democracy from a '*democracy of all*' to a '*democracy of the majority*' characterised by the principle that 'winner takes all'. In other

words, the notion of democracy, which is plural and based on the principle of tolerance for the different opinions present in society, coming into contact with populism tends to be progressively deformed and transformed from an instrument at the service of the people, understood in its plural dimension, to the exclusive instrument of the only people legitimated to define itself as such by the process that has been recalled above. In other words, it is, as Coleman observes, a process that poses a real risk to democracy itself since it depends on the existence of the commons:

"discursive habits and mechanism. For democracy to be meaningful, there must exist a recognised language of public disagreement. Without opportunities to reflect together, the public is vulnerable to manipulation by those who claim to speak in his name' (Coleman, 2017: 63).

Through these dynamics of its functioning, populism is thus configured as antithetical to the preservation of a public sphere understood as a unitary place of social discourse (Sorice, 2020). It follows, as Philp Schlesinger points out, that "if populism is a feature of post-democracy, then in line with this, political communication under these conditions might best be classified as operating in a post-public sphere" (Schlesinger, 2020).

THE POST-TRUTH ERA

One of the other relevant effects related to the fragmentation process operating within and by means of digital communication technologies, and in particular social media, concerns the progressive spread of phenomena that can be defined as "post-truth communication". In other words, it is a communication that is characterised by the growing presence of an increasingly widespread information disorder, marked by the pervasive presence of fake-news, often spread due to precise disinformation strategies.

It must be understood that fake news is by no means a novelty related to the internet era, and the process of disinformation, i.e. the premeditated creation of false information with the deliberate intention of changing the reputation of a person, group or an entire country in a negative way, is also a phenomenon that is by no means recent. Historically, fake

news has been used strategically, politically, economically or culturally very often and for a wide variety of reasons. The most striking example probably concerns the strategic sphere. In the course of the two world wars, for example, war propaganda, in its structural action of mystification of reality, constituted a central dimension in the strategies of the belligerent countries, both in terms of controlling the narrative of the conflict itself in what was usually defined as the so-called 'home front', i.e. the national context, and as a real offensive weapon useful for ensuring the morale of their own troops, and undermining that of the adversary troops (Bloch 2004, Lasswell 1927). In the course of the Cold War, the struggle for geopolitical and ideological hegemony that characterised the opposition between the two blocs, the pro-American and the pro-Soviet, was also expressed through narratives about the adversary that, very often, resorted to a systematic use of false or falsified news whose diffusion was functional to the consolidation of the ideological and geopolitical opposition. In short, the struggle for hegemony.

What can only be described as something new, however, is the intensity that the phenomenon of disinformation has assumed in the digital age. This fact can be traced back first of all to two innovative issues related to digital logics. On the one hand, the economic logic underlying the dynamics of digital capitalism has made the large-scale production and dissemination of fake news surprisingly profitable (Morozov, 2020). On the other hand, the increasingly globalised communicative context, together with the role played by digital media in influencing individuals' perception of reality through the process of mediatisation already analysed, has made internet a privileged terrain of the new geopolitical conflict underway. In other words, the digital media represent one of the scenarios of a veritable '*infowar*' fought through the creation and deployment of large-scale premeditated and coordinated disinformation campaigns aimed at destabilising a situation, influencing opinions, discrediting potential adversaries, and fostering a crisis. This is, in many ways, a new context and, if coordinated disinformation strategies are a relevant issue in the functioning of the post-public sphere (Slesinger, 2020), they undoubtedly also represent a real threat to the resilience of representative democracy.

The recent past has thus been characterised by the structural importance of lies in the field of communication, which has seen an exponential increase in terms of both production and dissemination. In some respects, fake news has taken on a somewhat

symbolic dimension of the communicative relations of our time, particularly for those in some way related to the political sphere. Digital communication technologies, and in particular the new ecosystem of platforms, represent the privileged environment for the dissemination of this often groundless news. And this is possible also thanks to the operating logic of digital platforms which, in a context lacking of precise regulation, offer an extraordinary economic incentive to the production of fake news that would otherwise not be found in these terms.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, recalling the definition proposed by Blumler (2018) an institution can be describes as being in crisis when it is no longer able to serve its ostensible purpose, in other words when 'its why and its what have become separated' (Anderson 2016: 153). We can therefore argue, as Davis (2019: 185-187) points out, that 'the relatively inclusive, shared and stable public spheres' of nation states have been replaced by a 'wild west of volatility, fragmentation and polarisation'. In other words, what we are witnessing is the progressive disintegration of 'national public spheres'. And the consequences are to be found in the new relationships between citizens, media and politics that are being defined in an increasingly anarchic regime. Authentic and reliable news is less and less in proportion to the total and is increasingly submerged in a background noise that makes it increasingly difficult to trace. And the trend towards ever greater polarisation is closely linked to the need to capture attention in an increasingly chaotic communication environment. And in such a context it is quite easy to imagine the negative consequences in terms of citizens' trust in traditional *legacy media*.

In this sense, the covid-19 pandemic may have partly changed the scenario, or at least made this process more complex and fragmented. Certainly, we have witnessed -and are witnessing- the constant dissemination of information that has no scientific basis whatsoever. And if some of it could be traced back to the aforementioned ongoing geopolitical conflict, others would seem to be of a more commercial or political nature. However, a certain reversal of the trend should also be noted, probably linked to the

epochal scale of the phenomenon, which has resulted in a strong demand for correct, reliable and scientifically based information on the pandemic crisis. Initial studies have shown that citizens' trust in governments and, to some extent, in institutions has increased considerably in relation to the management of the emergency. The space for reliable news about the new coronavirus has been ample in almost all countries and we have witnessed a daily presence of scientifically based communication as well.

The current context thus appears to be characterised by the parallel development of three of the concepts analysed above that have become established together with their consequences. However, post-democracy, post-truth and post-public sphere represent a triad of uncertainty rather than tools to accurately describe a new situation of stability. In other words, far from being at the end of the story, we are in the midst of a transition in which, while it may be beginning to become quite clear to us what is no longer the case, it is still completely impossible to draw precise contours of the developments we are facing. In other words, we are in the middle of a journey that we know has begun, but whose destination remains unknown to us. And it is precisely in the light of this perspective that we can best understand the reasons that lead us to take on the dimension of the crisis not as an extemporaneous factor or one linked from time to time to a single situation, but as the paradigmatic dimension of our time. A time in which, to quote Antonio Gramsci, 'the old world is dying. The new one is slow to appear'.

CHAPTER 2.

A POST-REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION, THE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX.

Until the late 1970s, more than two-thirds of UN member states could be described as non-democratic authoritarian regimes. Today this ratio, at least from a formal point of view, has shrunk to less than a third⁵. Referring to what was happening in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Norberto Bobbio observed that, 'contrary to the gloomy predictions of commentators concerned about the future of democracy in the world, democratic regimes, at least in Europe, had been expanding' (1991: XV). What we have witnessed, with regard to the affirmation of democratic regimes, has been an event of such magnitude that it led Held to assert that "in the present era, democracy has become the reference standard of political legitimacy" (1996). However, looking at the world as it appears today, the turn-of-the-century optimism about the progressive fortunes of democracy may appear, in some respects, overly optimistic (see Crouch 2003; 2020). In this sense, regimes that could be formally defined as democratic are seeing the consolidation of authoritarian dynamics that undermine civil rights, freedom of opinion, the autonomy of the judiciary and freedom of the press. This is the case, for example, in some Eastern European countries. Secondly, within the mature Western democracies we have seen the spread and consolidation of a populist style that acts as a disruptive force and is in many ways incompatible with the maintenance of a stable representative dynamic and the existence of a shared political space.

With increasing force and new arguments, 'regimes that claim to be democratic are coming under vigorous criticism almost everywhere' (Rosanvallon, 2006: 1). The problems within democracies in terms of mistrust are well known, and the concomitant crisis of traditional political actors and representative institutions, particularly in their function of synthesising the democratic process of representation, has also been widely studied. The actors of representation are on the front line of a crisis that, in some respects, does not seem reversible. From this point of view, in fact, the collapse in terms of *membership* of

⁵ Ref. Freedom House Observatory, 2016 Report

the traditional actors of participation is perhaps one of the most evident phenomena, but it must be contextualised in the more general context of distrust that marks their work. In other words, a paradox is consolidating whereby "despite what would now seem to be an undisputed affirmation, democracy is encountering difficulties almost everywhere". The "paradox of democracy" is a strange one: on the one hand, it is spreading all over the world; on the other, in societies where democratic institutions are older, they are also the object of strong disillusionment. In the strongholds of democracy - Europe and the United States - polls show growing shares of the population dissatisfied or indifferent towards it. (Giddens 2001, 235)

In this regard, it is useful here to briefly recall the literature on the so-called 'crisis of democracy'. In 1987, Sartori spoke of a phenomenon of instability of democracy, which he described as an 'era of confusion of democracy' (1987, 3). This confusion was characterised first and foremost by a time perspective of political action that was becoming increasingly shorter. Political action was increasingly focused on the contingencies of the present and was finding it increasingly difficult to define itself as thinking and acting in the medium term. Kaase and Newton, a few years later, concentrating on the increasingly marked difficulties of the traditional actors of participation, speak more directly of a "crisis of democracy" caused, precisely, by the progressive "disenchantment of citizens with political parties, the emergence of anti-party attitudes and the growing incidence of general dissatisfaction" (1995, 150). Pharr and Putnam speak of 'dissatisfied democracies' (2000), referring to the adaptations and transformations of political parties, which are increasingly unable to act as a transmission belt with civil society and organise political actions in terms of a coherent representation of interests. Still referring to the transformations of the political party, Peter Mair (2000) describes the current democratic context as characterised by a *partyless democracy*, which is inevitably destined to a systemic crisis, since the parties represent the "central institutions of democratic governments" (Katz, 1986: 36).

Many of these readings can be traced back to the common minimum of a focus on the consequences of the internal transformations of democratic processes and, in particular, those faced by the main actors of representative democracy. Other readings of the phase traversed by representative democracy have focused more on practices by framing them

in a dimension that, rather than the crisis of democracy, refers to a process of crisis in democracy, and in particular to a historical form of democracy, namely the representative one (Salvati 2016; Urbinati 2016; Morlino 2017).

In this sense, the combination of participation in the democratic process on the one hand - i.e. the *input* - and the product of this process in terms of good governance - i.e. the output - tends to result in constant criticality. This perpetual state of dissatisfaction can be depicted as a characteristic of the democratic regime that is far from new. Indeed, it is in the "DNA of democracies to be in constant tension between what politicians promise and what they deliver, between what democracy theorists think democracy should be and what it actually is" (Tormey 2015, 15). This is because the underlying ideal of democracy, namely the substantive equality of citizens, lives by a nature that is both processual and ideal. Norberto Bobbio (1991), in this regard, expressly spoke of "*unfulfilled promises of democracy*", referring both to the equality of citizens in terms of equal possibility of influencing the outcome of political decisions, and in terms of "good governance", that is, with regard to the adherence of the political choices made by those formally in a position to exercise political power with the collective opinions of the citizens. Democracy is thus "permanently in a critical state or crisis. Because it is in permanent tension towards a citizenry that has less need of politics as a transmission belt of organised private interests as it is more egalitarian, with citizens not constrained by economic pressure" who need it in different forms and, certainly, lower in intensity and needs. (Urbinati, 2016: 987)

In the first place, on the *output* side, the profound transformations that have taken place in recent years, both on the international level and with respect to the irruption of the dynamics of digital capitalism, have had and continue to have a heavy impact on the spectrum of executive possibilities in terms of government response, the quality and feasibility of which increasingly depends on the presence or absence of external constraints imposed by the international economic system. In other words, a phenomenon of which we can certainly find fairly ancient traces has been consolidating, but which today has taken on disruptive characteristics. As better described in the first chapter, the expansion of the economic dimension to the detriment of the political one within the differentiation process has progressively shifted the centres of power from the hands of political oligarchies to economic oligarchies. In this process, then, the globalising

dynamics of digital capitalism describe an increasingly narrow and global circle of economic and financial oligarchies whose activities and capacities easily exceed the concrete possibilities of control and regulation of the vast majority of national governments. In a certain sense, political power as such has shifted towards small, often anonymous circles that do not respond to any logic other than that of accumulation. It is a dynamic that can be anything but oriented towards putting the logic of profit before values of a solidarity-based or egalitarian nature, which are precisely those of the democratic ideal.

In this context, it appears increasingly evident how individual nation states (with differences from country to country with respect to historical or internal system conditions) are facing these changes brought about by globalisation and the financialisation of markets with ever greater difficulty and fewer instruments of action. But in this perspective, "democracy being a national affair, individual citizens direct their dissatisfaction towards the governments of their countries" (Salvati 2016,971), attributing responsibility for the state of affairs to national governments and parliaments rather than to the global context. It is increasingly complicated to realise how the possibilities of action of individual countries are progressively limited by an increasingly interconnected international economic context⁶ and how this fact often translates into a lack of effective responses to peoples' needs. This dynamic of "expropriation of power" brought into play by the logic of digital capitalism aggravates and accelerates distrust in institutions and, more generally, in democratic politics, which is often incapable, and sometimes completely unable, to provide adequate responses. In other words, as observed especially in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and the exponential growth of economic inequalities that followed, citizens' "dissatisfaction with the ability of governments to satisfactorily solve the problems that the economic crisis has magnified" has grown (Urbinati 2016, 983).

⁶ With reference to this process, Bobbio (1991) wrote that "the future of democracy lies not only in the extension of the number of democratic states, but also, and above all, in the pursuit of the process of democratisation of the international system" (p. XII).

It is in this contextual debate that the first reflections on the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic crisis should be framed. In the emergency phase, we witnessed two phenomena that can both be traced back to the above-mentioned debate, albeit from different perspectives. On the one hand, there has been a widespread, and in some ways not new, debate on the greater capacity of non-democratic regimes to manage emergencies. In this sense, there have also been real propaganda campaigns on how some of these countries manage emergencies with great skill. This is the case, for example, of the People's Republic of China and its global commitment to portraying itself as the great power that had managed, in the first phase of the country's almost total 'lockdown', to bring the emergency under control while the Western democracies would have had more difficulty. At the same time, however, within almost all the western democracies there has been a progressive increase in the confidence of the populations in the executive of every order and degree. In some respects, this was a reversal of the chronic crisis of mistrust witnessed in previous years.

Secondly, we are witnessing a profound "change on the input side, that is, of the forms of democratic participation and the ways in which parties and governments respond to it" (Salvati 2016: 972). Those subjects that had traditionally organised and structured participation in the democratic process have undergone such transformations that they very often appear as actors increasingly anchored in institutional ganglia and less and less tools for linking civil society and the actual exercise of political power. From this perspective, there is, on the part of increasingly relevant sections of the population, a widespread "dissatisfaction with the way in which representatives reflect their preferences and what they choose to bring into the public sphere of decision-making" (Urbinati 2016: 989). All this results in a more general "crisis of parliamentary democracy built on elections run by political parties, organs of participation, not simply of selection of political personnel" (Ibid.). In other words, what we are witnessing is not so much a crisis of democracy itself, which although it does not enjoy "excellent health in the world, nor has it ever enjoyed it in the past, it is not on the verge of the grave" (Bobbio 1991, XV), but rather a crisis of a mode of being of democracy, that is, its representative expression. Ultimately, it is this relationship that has undeniably entered a state of crisis.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, AN UNRESOLVED ISSUE

The concepts of representation and democracy seem to be inseparably linked, but both historically and conceptually this is true only up to a certain point. The concept of representation is, in the first place, a concept that historically predates the establishment of democracy as a widespread political regime. In this regard, in fact, one can find traces of a rather advanced reflection on the concept of representation already in the period between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries⁷, and especially in the ecclesiastical sphere (Sorice, 2015). In its first statements in the more strictly political sphere, the dimensions of representation and democracy are even profoundly unrelated. If in the Europe of constitutional monarchies representation is essentially understood as a form of legitimisation of the existing aristocratic-monarchic power, in the same way on the other side of the Atlantic representation is outlined as a tool to select and legitimise a new aristocracy called to exercise political power. The reference in this case is to the thought of James Madison who, while describing the need for elections to legitimise political power, warns against the risks inherent in the egalitarian perspectives of democracy, the realisation of which is associated with dimensions of chaos, disorder and anarchy. In the tradition of the thought of the founding fathers of the Union, therefore, we also find a reference to representation as a means of legitimising the bourgeois class in the exercise of political power, but we find this conceptualisation separate from and indeed in clear opposition to any possible democratic perspective.

The concept of representation is traditionally connected to two poles: the electoral pole on the one hand and the participation pole on the other. However, the relationship between democracy and elections -nowadays apparently inseparable- is also something that is far from obvious and only fairly recent. In other words, the processual dimension of elections, or more generally of voting, as Bernard Manin (1997) has pointed out,

⁷ Three concepts of representation were already traceable in this period: a) *delegated*, i.e. connected to the electoral principle although not yet traceable to conceptualisations of universal suffrage; b) *symbolic*, i.e. a smaller entity symbolically representing the whole larger structure, as in the case of the relationship between the council and the Church as a whole; c) *mimetic*, with respect to which a micro-community acts and functions as the reflection of a larger community. (Sorice 2016)

represents the point of arrival of the historical and evolutionary process of democracy and not a characteristic of it. On the basis of these reflections, it is therefore possible to deduce how the concept of representation is independent of that of democracy "to the point that it is possible to have forms of (*symbolic* and *delegated*) representation even in non-democratic regimes" (Sorice 2015, 110).

It is useful here to recall the double meaning of the term 'representation' proposed by Hanna Pitkin (1967). The latter, starting from a binary perspective, divides the concept of representation between "acting on behalf of" -acting *for*- and "speaking on behalf of" -standing *for*-. Even with all its limitations⁸, mainly related to the evolution of society in an increasingly mediatised political context, the proposed interpretative scheme has the merit of defining representation as a structurally dynamic concept, and not simply resolvable to the dimension of the electoral process.

Table No. 02 Representation (source: Pitkin, 1967)	
Representation as	Meaning
<i>Standing for</i>	Descriptive representation (representation by similarity)
	Symbolic representation (representation by evocation)
Acting for	Authorisation (acting on behalf of someone with taking responsibility for actions taken)
	Accountability (being accountable for one's actions to those represented)
	Protecting the interests of the represented

⁸ In this regard, 'the bipartition between standing for and acting for now seems unsuitable to interpret the change in the dynamics of relations between representatives and represented as well as of these in the new scenario of mediatised politics. Indeed, the media are only partially interpretable in Hanna Pitkin's scheme' (Sorice 2016, 30).

The interpretative scheme proposed by Pitkin divides the meanings of the concept of representation into two broad interpretative strands (Sorice 2016: 29):

- a) *that based on the dynamics of accountability, authorisation and substantive action (acting on behalf of);*
- b) *those of a descriptive and symbolic nature, in which the representative stands in place of a person (or group of persons) or even an object.*

From a historical-political point of view, representative democracy gradually consolidates around the electoral process and finds its basis in the centrality that this process attributes to the dimension of delegation the formal, as well as symbolic, role of representing one of the constitutive elements of the represented-representative relationship. In other words, it can be affirmed that "the expression representative democracy generically means that collective deliberations, that is, deliberations that concern the entire collectivity, are taken not directly by those who belong to it, but by people elected for this purpose" (Bobbio 1991, 31). The parliamentary state is then, in turn, a particular application of the principle of representation, which, as Kelsen (1981) reiterates, sees in the synthesis of the pluralism of social interests at the level of the parliamentary institution a strength of the institution itself and not a *vulnus*. On the basis of this perspective, the parliamentary system receives its legitimacy precisely because of its ability to reflect the pluralism of civil society in the Assemblies, and through the various parties that organise the elected representatives. In this sense, Parliament can be defined as the 'mirror of the country' and 'the impulses coming from the political parties are like numerous underground sources feeding a river that comes to the surface only in the popular assembly or in Parliament, and then flows here in a single bed' (Kelsen 1981: 55).

There are essentially four essential characteristics of representative democracy (Urbinati 2013: 89):

- a) *the sovereignty of the people expressed through the election of representatives;*
- b) *representation as a free mandate relationship;*

- c) *an electoral mechanism that ensures a certain degree of accountability to the people by the representatives who speak and act on their behalf;*
- d) *universal suffrage, which bases representation on political equality.*

The electoral moment is therefore as central from a formal as it is from a symbolic point of view. But in order to function in relation to liberal democracy representation needs some form of control by the represented party over the representative that goes beyond the simple electoral dimension and that, more precisely, takes place in the period between one electoral moment and the next. In this sense, there is a centrality, which cannot be resolved in any other way of the proxy that translates into the political mandate.

In this sense, it can already be deduced that elected representation in some way requires political parties and their essential function as mediating actors and synthesising the relationship between the represented and the representative. However, the political mandate lives in constant tension, since if on the one hand it can only be free, on the other it must be subjected to some form of temperment that brings it within the dimension of respect for the political priorities that lie at the heart of the relationship of delegation in the hands of the elected party. This dialectic can only be articulated in a dynamic of free mandate. But it is in the tension between free mandate and tempering of the latter that lurks a still open question of the relationship between representation and liberal democracy and, at the same time, a traditional element of crisis in liberal democracy. Indeed, if representatives are subjected to a form of imperative mandate, they would have to respond slavishly to a principal through some sort of binding contract, which by its very nature is incompatible with democratic principles. In the democratic process, the principal can only be a plural one, i.e. the electoral body as a whole. On the contrary, the imperativeness of the mandate should be traced to a single or at least clearly identifiable subject, who would exercise a power of control that is arbitrary and absolutely contrary to the most basic principles and values of democracy itself. In this sense, in actual fact, the imperative mandate would act as a yoke on the representative and would be brought back into the hands of the individual leader of the party to which it refers, thus accentuating possible authoritarian drifts in the system. It is not a coincidence that, precisely in order to avoid pathological drifts of this kind, many constitutions since the

Second World War have expressly indicated the provision of free mandate as a constitutional guarantee⁹. One of the characteristics of the imperative mandate is the possibility of its revocation on the grounds of violation. In this sense, "the demand for the voters to revoke the mandate on the basis of the imperative mandate is characteristic of Marxist political thought. It was Marx himself (1948, 148) who gave prominence to the fact that in the Commune of Paris this 'was composed of the municipal councillors elected by universal suffrage in the various districts of Paris, responsible and revocable at any time'¹⁰ " (Bobbio 1991, 42). Thus, the political mandate of the representative in a democratic context can only be formally free. But, at the same time, in order to allow a regular involvement of the electoral body he represents, it must meet certain minimum conditions of *accountability*. It must in some way be possible for the representatives to assess the actions of the elected both during and at the end of the term of office, so that they can decide whether or not to renew their mandate when new elections are held or to indirectly exercise a form of control to ensure that the representative's actions remain within the limits of a certain adherence to some form of common feeling.

In this sense, the decisive role played by the political party (and its parliamentary group) as an instrument both of discipline and consistency with respect to the electoral programmes and of *accountability* for the work of the delegation is clear. The mandate cannot but be formally free, but must at the same time be tempered. It is precisely in this relationship that the decisive role of the political party comes into play. As described very clearly by Nadia Urbinati (2013: 99):

- 1) *Since representatives make laws that all citizens, not just those who elected them, must abide by, the political mandate implies that they represent the entire nation, not just the electoral college that elected them. This means that their mandate is not based on any contract with the voters [...].*
- 2) *The legal mandate makes the representative directly responsible to his client, to whom he is legally accountable. But the political representative is neither legally accountable to those who voted for him nor bound by personal relationships. This clause is fundamental to respect for freedom. Indeed,*

⁹ This is the case of the Italian Constitution of 1946, which contains the discipline of the free parliamentary mandate in Article 67.

¹⁰ The imperative mandate would later also be taken up by Lenin in 'State and Revolution' to be enshrined in the constitution of the Soviet Union in 1922.

the free mandate allows representatives to take decisions that do not betray the general character of the law. Freedom and political equality prohibit a legally binding mandate.

- 3) *A private lawyer has only the powers that the client grants him. But voters have no legal power to make their opinions compelling, which means that the current currency of representation is ideological [...].*

In this framework, the party assumes the role and function of guarantor of the political mandate and plays an essential function within "a normative dimension of representative democracy" (Sorice, Trino 2014). Representative democracy, therefore, "functions only on the condition of avoiding a contraposition between imperative mandate and free mandate, making sure that the latter is tempered by some form of popular control" (Sorice 2016, 31). In order for this balance to be possible, and once the incompatibility of the imperative mandate with the concept of democracy has been established, political parties, which organise interests and, on the basis of the consensus acquired, determine the political agenda on the basis of priorities that are as consistent as possible with the mandate received, are indispensable.

It is under this lens that the process of transformation and profound crisis of confidence that political parties and, more generally, the traditional actors of political representation go through in the post-democratic context should be observed. In this sense, the process of *disintermediation*, i.e. "that phenomenon whereby institutions and subjects of representative democracy and mandate [...] fall prey to an irreversible crisis of function and role, following the establishment of an increasingly direct and unmediated relationship between public decision-makers and civil society" (Fasano 2016, 44), acquires particular relevance as a symptomatic element of this crisis. In other words, disintermediation contributes to a progressive loss of importance of intermediate bodies and, therefore, accentuates the criticalities of representation by favouring the development of "a democracy [...] more and more of representation" (Fasano 2016, 47).

TOWARDS NEGATIVE SOVEREIGNTY

The crisis of the traditional forms of representative politics (Tormey 2015) has produced different reactions at a social level and can be grouped into three major trends (Sorice 2016). First of all, there is a dimension that can be traced back to a greater degree of social apathy, a phenomenon that has historically been linked to representative democracy and which can be summarised in the total disinterest in public affairs and institutions "partly connected to the growing perception of futility" of political action (ibid. 35). In other words, the number of citizens who feel betrayed by the democratic promise, as well as a sense of usefulness of participation, both at election time and - from a more general perspective - in their interest in politics or representative institutions, is increasing. On the other side of this process is the increasingly widespread diffusion of a general crisis of trust and, therefore, of a demand for ever greater control over the democratic process. But in parallel with all these phenomena, there is also a dimension of emergence of new questions and new forms of participation which, since they no longer find a functional and symbolic output through the traditional forms of representation, like a karst river are gradually seeking new and different possibilities for action. In this sense, we are witnessing the emergence of new demands for political participation that tend to be organised along unconventional channels.

As already noted in the previous chapter, the widespread mistrust, resulting in this case from the crisis of representation, facilitates and provides elements for the spread of a demand for ever greater control over representative institutions and those who work within them. Rosanvallon (2006) describes this phenomenon as the consolidation of a "democracy of organised distrust", i.e. a democracy "founded not so much on the desire to have a greater influence on decision-making processes and on the basic political choices, but on the need for sanctioning control over the work of representatives (who therefore become 'in principle' unreliable unless proven wrong)". (Sorice 2016, 35). More and more, as time passes and the weakening of the intermediate agents of representative democracy became even more structured, the electoral process seems to lose the capacity to unite in itself both the dimension of the procedural legitimacy of representation and the dimension of a progressive trust functional to the exercise of the mandate. In this sense, if from a procedural point of view, the vote (free, secret, recurring and equal) remains the primary source of legitimacy of the representative process, on the

level of trust there are a proliferation of requests for transparency, control or verification of procedures. These are real narratives that have gradually established themselves as dominant and pervasive. All forms of public policy aimed at ensuring the transparency of procedures and, above all, of the expenditure of public money, can be traced back to attempts to react to this phenomenon. However, very often these have been structured on a dynamic that has limited itself to making a large amount of data available, particularly through digital online tools, without however guaranteeing real accessibility or understanding. One of the risks of procedures of this kind, in fact, is the large amount of background noise produced by a huge amount of content and data within which, for reasons both of time and expertise, it can often be difficult to move around with the aim of finding truly decisive content.

In other words, in the climate of generalised mistrust that characterises the post-democratic phase, the so-called 'surveillance powers', i.e. those post-electoral practices of control by the represented over the representative to ensure that the latter fulfils his commitments, are becoming increasingly central.

In this respect, Kenneth Arrow defined trust as a kind of 'invisible institution' capable, as far as politics are concerned, of 'adding to its procedural character a moral dimension (integrity in the broadest sense) and a substantial dimension (concern for the common good)' (Rosanvallon 2006, 11). Trust, in this sense, acts both as a factor in the general stability of the system and as an instrument for guaranteeing the temporal continuity of the representative-represented mandate relationship between one election and the next. As long as the vote was oriented by ideological adherence or belonging or, in any case, was mainly directed towards a party-system capable of exercising a link between civil society and the political sphere, the relationship of trust could find in the party itself a subject of guarantee. In other words, it was the party that was responsible for monitoring and supervising its elected members. Consequently voting for the party combined both a procedural type of legitimacy, expressed through the party itself, and a more properly fiduciary legitimacy. The latter derived in a certain sense from the fact that, by voting for a party, one had the perception of adhering to, or at least delegating, a collective project. It would be the party that would watch over its members in the institution and so that they would respect that bond of trust mentioned above. If this were not the case, one

could still count on a general context in respect of which the sanction would come first and foremost from the party itself, or in any case would come from the social dimension. With the progressive disintermediation, the consequences partly due to misalignment and more generally those concerning the crisis and the consequent transformation of the parties into subjects increasingly far away from an effective relationship of representation and, more generally, into electoral machines at the service of a candidate, this guarantee of trust has gradually crumbled. Given the aforementioned characteristics linked to the affirmation of the 'risk society', this has led to an overall redefinition of the dimension of distrust from a democratic point of view towards a tendency whose 'aim in this case is to ensure that the elected power remains faithful to its commitments' (Ibid. 13).

In other words, what emerges is a veritable "negative social sovereignty" that is based more on "practices of interdiction" than on practices of proposition. In other words, it is a question of all those activities of contrast and opposition that progressively assert themselves to the detriment of those of proposal or project. In this context, the electoral legitimisation procedure, understood as an authorisation to operate, no longer seems to be enough. In this new scenario, characterised by the constant confrontation between the positive dynamics of proposals and the negative dynamics of veto, representation processes sees the latter prevailing. And this has clear effects in terms of accelerating the crisis of the representative form of democracy since "it is positive representation that represents the creative energies of democracy. The negative model", on the contrary, "with its struggle against the political class, shares with the passive approach to democracy the idea that politics is essentially an affair of the elite, subject to being accused and blamed by a mass that watches and is angry when it discovers that they have done something wrong" (Crouch 2003, 19).

From the point of view of political participation, this dimension, in which the negative character of political action prevails, also presents clear organisational incentives. So-called 'negative coalitions', i.e. those based on the participants' common feeling of opposing a single *issue*, are much easier to structure than coalitions of positive proposals. Such coalitions in fact "do not need to be coherent in order to achieve their aim" (Rosanvallon: 18), but rather bring together distant or contradictory social elements, united simply by the common feeling of wanting to oppose a proposal and then, most

likely, dissolving shortly after having obtained or not the intended result. It is also possible that this dynamic 'infects' the electoral moment itself. From this perspective, it is possible to explain those increasingly frequent cases of real elections with a 'sanctioning' character in which 'popular sovereignty is increasingly manifested as a power of refusal in the periodic electoral expression or in the permanent opposition to the decisions of the governors' (Ibid.). In this sense, the search for a tangible and immediate result plays a very important, and in some ways prevalent, role. It is a process strongly linked to the dynamics of today's highly mediatised context. And this is essentially due to the fact that "prohibition actions produce really tangible and visible effects. Obtaining the withdrawal of a bill perfectly realises the intention of the actor, whereas the measure of success of a pressure to implement a proposal will certainly be more controversial". (Ibid. 13).

Another possible example of this logic, which assumes greater relevance in those democracies characterised by a highly unstable political regime, can be found in the so-called phenomena of the "judicialisation of the political". Not only, therefore, is there a dilution of the political sphere with respect to the economic sphere, but elements and practices that, at least in theory, do not necessarily have to do with the political sphere acquire a new and diriment political significance. In other words, and in close correlation with the progressive crisis of the political parties as interpreters of the representative process insofar as they are increasingly anchored by inertia to the power of the state, the perception of the moment of voting as the occasion through which a concrete change in policies can be achieved is reduced. In this context, in fact, 'the citizen is sometimes tempted to expect from a trial those results which he no longer hopes to obtain through the election: in the absence of a satisfactory exercise of political responsibility, he seeks to criminally determine a guilty party' (ibid., 161). The administration of justice, therefore, increasingly acquires a political value to the extent that important trials involving political figures become real events. The phenomena of *spectacularisation*, by now consolidated in the political sphere, are extended to the sphere of judgement and the courtrooms themselves are conceived, also from the point of view of the very physical space, with the aim of giving more and more space to an audience of spectators. At the same time, some of the practices proper to the exercise of justice are transferred to the political sphere in a framework in which Parliament tends almost to turn into a sort of Court of Justice in

which "the majority plays the role of the defence and the opposition that of the accusation in front of a permanent tribunal, which is composed of public opinion, and in front of another tribunal, more solemn, but with rarer decisions, that of the voters" (Ibid 173). Consequently, by taking on the point of view of the citizen voter, voting processes increasingly takes on the retrospective dimension of a judgement on the past rather than the prospect of a concession of trust to the representative to carry out an electoral programme. And this process takes place in a general context in which the set of 'surveillance powers', 'forms of interdiction' and the 'judicialisation of the political sphere" define the three pillars of what Rosanvallon has called 'counter-democracy'¹¹.

THE CONCEPT OF PASSIVE CITIZEN

Traditionally, there are four indicators that can be found behind many of the diagnoses of the 'crisis of representative democracy' and -consequently- decline in political participation (Norris 2002; Dalton 2004). These are, respectively, the turnout rate; the *membership of* political parties; the trust that citizens have in politicians and, finally, the rate of interest in politics.

The first and perhaps most obvious indicator of the state of health of the representative process can be found in electoral turnout. Generally speaking, a low turnout, and hence a high rate of abstentionism, suggests that something is not working properly, that there are, in other words, large swathes of the population who consider it pointless even to take part in the electoral process. It is precisely in this sense that in many European countries there has been a general decline in electoral participation in recent decades, which has declined from between 80 and 90 percent to between 70 and 60 percent within half a century (see Tormey 2015). While it is true that abstention is rising today, it is rather

¹¹ In the author's intention, it is not to be understood as "the opposite of democracy; it is rather a form of democracy that contrasts the other, the democracy of organised distrust in the face of the democracy of electoral legitimacy" (Rosanvallon. 14)

difficult to deduce an inexorable decline since, on some occasions, including recent ones, there are cases of national elections in which this negative trend has been reversed¹².

Second, there has long been a clear crisis in political party membership (Tormey 2015, Sorice 2012, Morlino 2013). In almost all European political parties, in fact, memberships have declined drastically and continuously with the sole exception of the Labour Party at the general congress that saw Jeremy Corbyn elected Leader. But, as will be discussed in more detail below, in addition to the decline in party membership, the party's organisational model and its relationship with society has changed, and its function as a link between civil society and the state has undoubtedly been distorted. Finally, indicators such as "trust in politicians" and "interest in politics" are also showing increasingly negative trends.

However, if one were to limit oneself to analysing political participation through the lens offered by all these variables, the consequences would not be far removed from gloomy predictions of widespread passivity and the inexorable advent of an increasingly generalised social apathy. In this sense the traditional definitions of representation, such as the one proposed by Hanna Pitkin¹³, or even more recent ones that are less binary-focused, outline a reflection of participation that sees in the electoral process and in the parties one of the points of maximum expression. And yet, more and more often the evidence offered by these variables is accompanied by the presence and increased relevance of new 'unconventional' forms of participation that cannot but be relevant for an in-depth reflection on political participation and, more generally, on the state of health of representative democracy. Precisely on this basis, "political science has endeavoured to distinguish 'unconventional' forms of participation, noting that these are multiplying at a time when voter turnout seems to be declining" (Rosanvallon 2006, 20). From this point of view, politics is defined as "more than just electoral moments. It is also about how people organise themselves, mobilise themselves, to contest power from outside as well as from within the framework of elections" (Tormey 2015, 25). In other words, 'the

¹² This was the case, for example, with the French elections in 2012 or the German federal elections in 2013, or even the general elections in Italy the same year.

phenomenon of abstention or decline in trust needs to be reframed within a broader analysis of changing forms of democratic activity' (Ibid. 21). While parties and traditional representative organisations are seeing their structures weaken, pressure groups or associations of various kinds are developing and reorganising in ways that the traditional bipartition between conventional and unconventional participation is increasingly difficult to pin down.

There are three dimensions to the relationship between the social sphere and the political sphere. These are: *expression*, i.e. society taking the floor, expressing its opinions, making demands or formulating judgments; *involvement*, i.e. "all the means by which citizens organise themselves and join together to produce a common world" (Rosanvallon 2006, 21); and finally, *intervention*, i.e. forms of collective action aimed at achieving a desired result. What we are witnessing, then, is not so much a decline of democracy but a profound change in the dynamics of participation. In fact, 'while electoral democracy has been unquestionably eroded, the democracies of expression, co-involvement and intervention have developed and strengthened'. (Ibid., 22). In other words, the electoral process understood as the expression of collective belonging is lost, and so the vote loses its unifying capacity of all the three dimensions listed above. But this does not mean that the consequence is to be found in prevailing apathy or in a progressive and unstoppable civic passivity. It is therefore appropriate 'in every respect to speak of the myth of the passive citizen' (ibid.).

While innovative forms of political participation are increasingly affirming, more and more research shows that the general crisis in the forms of representative democracy, characterised above all by the crisis and the consequent transformation of the political party, is accompanied by a rooting in the values of democracy in the general sense. In other words, while distrust of the traditional actors of representation seems to be in crisis, this same crisis does not seem to be directed towards the foundations of the democratic system. In other words, while distrust of traditional actors of representation seems to be characterised by the dimension of crisis, this same crisis does not seem to be directed towards the foundations of the democratic system. In other respects, political spaces are opening up for new demands for participation, and it is in "this trend that the emergence and affirmation of new actors of participation can be placed: from non-governmental

organisations to initiatives promoted by citizens "from below", from movements for global justice to spontaneous local initiatives" (Sorice 2015, 53). From this perspective, it does not seem at all coincidental that "these practices involve new forms of representation and are only marginally connected with voting and electoral practice" (ibid. 36). Precisely with regard to these new forms of participation, which are often occasional and generally characterised by innovative forms of mobilisation, the internet era, with the net of a *digital divide* that should always be taken into account as it is still widespread, offers unprecedented possibilities in terms of organisational resources and the mobilisation of new forms of political participation (De Blasio 2014). In this context, as will be further explored in the next chapter, there is no lack of narratives and techno-optimistic readings that see digital tools as an instrument for liberation and democratisation and, linked to this logic, the technical possibility offered by the digital itself to make direct democracy practices possible. In this regard, Bobbio's intuition, which warned against the possible drift into authoritarian forms of an ideal direct democracy through the Internet, is still valid. "The hypothesis that the future *computerocracy*, as it has been called, will allow the exercise of direct democracy, i.e. give every citizen the possibility of transmitting their vote to an electronic brain, is puerile. Judging by the laws that are enacted every day in Italy, the good citizen should be called upon to cast his vote at least once a day" (Bobbio 1991, 34). In this sense Bobbio also stressed how excessive participation, in theory, could lead to what Dahrendorf (1977) described as the 'total citizen'¹⁴. Moreover, "humanly, that is, from the point of view of the ethical and intellectual development of humanity, it would not be desirable [...]" since "the Rousseauian individual called upon to participate from morning to night in order to exercise his duties as a citizen would not be the total man¹⁵, but the total citizen". (Bobbio 1991, 34-35).

¹⁴"The total citizen is, on closer inspection, only the no less threatening other face of the total state. ...] Total citizen and total state are two sides of the same coin, because they have in common, even if once considered from the point of view of the people, the other time from the point of view of the prince, the same principle: that everything is politics, the reduction of all human interests to the interests of the polis, the integral politicisation of man, the resolution of man in the citizen, the complete elimination of the private sphere in the public sphere". Dahrendorf (1977, 59)

¹⁵ In his early writings, Marx (1998) pointed to total man as the goal of human development.

MOVEMENT POLITICS

It would be a serious mistake to translate the crisis described above into a widespread rejection of participation - or worse, of politics *tout court* - by citizens. *In fact*, if on the one hand the crisis of the 'great political visions' interpreted by the mass parties in a classic representative context appears to be no longer reversible, on the other hand new forms of political participation, including, for example, *movement politics*, are literally spreading. These are mainly *cause-oriented* and impromptu forms, but not unimportant in terms of their mobilisation potential or their ability to cross national borders and give rise to transnational movements¹⁶. These movements are mainly characterised by simple messages and, in the vast majority of cases, are not critical of the foundations of democracy as such. The 'occupy' movement, for example, did not reject the democratic institution at all, nor did it set out to overturn it; on the contrary, is acting for 'more' and demanded a greater and more incisive participatory role for the '99%' excluded or marginalised in the current democratic context.

What is affirmed is a growing desire for participation that is no longer necessarily bound to the logic of traditional representation. This fact is true to the extent that participation comes to reconfigure itself as a possible tool for a redefinition on new bases of the very institutional structure¹⁷ of representative democracies (Sorice 2014). Consequently, simply interpreting voting participation or, more generally, the traditional categories of participation, in a context of strong delegitimization and crisis of intermediate agents, leaves much of the current context out of consideration. Clearly, representative democracy has historically found its legitimacy first and foremost in the effective exercise of active voting by citizens. However, what we are witnessing today is the spread of abstentionist citizens who - although they do not vote - are active and participate, perhaps in other forms than the 'classic' one. In this sense, it would be appropriate to shift the

¹⁶ This is the case of movements such as Occupy, #99% or the Indignant.

¹⁷ One of the most significant cases in this regard was the participatory experiment set up in Iceland to rewrite the Constitution.

attention to the inadequacy of the offer - unable to intercept these new forms - (i.e. the crisis of intermediate bodies) rather than to the growing - and, moreover, highly debatable - apathy of the citizen-voters in terms of 'decline in demand'. Precisely in this key of interpretation "social movements represent an important response to indifference and social apathy and are configured as actors of change, even in the form of internal democracy" since "they tend to define a *collective we*, or to build an identity" (Sorice 2016, 40).

The politics carried out by the movements is a form of politics that is based less and less on strong ideologies and more and more on a widespread sense of injustice that acts both as a glue and as a mobilising factor. Injustice as an aggregative factor of political participation has in fact numerous organisational incentives: "one does not need to develop a drive towards an ideal society to be convinced of the injustice of colonialism, racial discrimination, child labour, the trafficking of women for the sex industry. [...] Injustice is simple and direct. It speaks to values shared by the majority, such as respect, dignity. [...] It does not require any elaborate philosophy or doctrine. Injustice suggests its own solution: the end of an intolerable situation'. (Tormey 2015, 87) This is even more evident if one compares the characteristics of injustice with those of ideology. Ideology, in fact, is by its very nature divisive both horizontally, between those who believe and identify with it and those who do not, and vertically -or internally- because it generates ideologues, leaders on the one hand and militants, supporters on the other. On the contrary, "the struggle against injustice certainly creates leaders; but these tend to act as *exemplary figures* who personify in their actions the simple message of the cause in which they believe" (Tormey 2015, 87).

The economic crisis of 2008 reactivated an age-old conflict between capitalism and democracy, and in some ways represented the tombstone for any reflection on the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). The deep recession that followed acted as a catalyst for the crisis of the forms of representative democracy, speeding up a collapse of trust and credibility - already present for some time - towards the traditional subjects of politics, perceived as incapable of coping with the rising tide. Responsibility for the ever-increasing social inequalities, and the economic difficulties of increasingly large sections of the middle class in many Western democracies, is attributed by citizens to their respective

governments. But the means available to individual democracies in the global economic context are increasingly scarce, due to the advantage of technocratic or private institutions that not only easily cross national borders, but also increasingly take on a role of directing and controlling economic affairs. In other words, the "political-democratic dimension is on a state-national basis, the economic-financial dimension is on a global basis: this divergence plays all to the advantage of the latter, with the increase of arbitrary power of non-political actors (financial agencies and multinationals) and the asphyxiation of institutions governed by the impartiality of the law and the sovereignty of the state". (Urbinati 2016, 982) Thus, a tendency is generated whereby "democracy is captured by the interests it is supposed to regulate and indifferent to the living conditions of the classes it is supposed to represent and defend" (Salvati 2016, 974). In conclusion, referring to the theory proposed by Morlino (1998, 2011), the economic crisis has contributed to the emergence of phenomena of democratic *disenfranchisement* by increasing the "delegitimization of the link between representation and democracy; in other words, the economic crisis plays a dramatically important role in the process of delegitimization of the traditional mechanisms of electoral representation" (Sorice 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

With respect to the conception of democracy, the notion of crisis can be considered more as a crisis of a mode of being of democracy than a crisis of democracy itself. In other words, it is a specific and particular dimension of democracy that is in a state of crisis: the representative dimension. Although the link between representation and democracy may seem indissoluble, the two concepts are not in fact to be considered as necessarily overlapping. The concept of representation, in fact, is independent of that of democracy, and indeed, from a historical point of view, the concept of representation has also been, in some moments, in open contrast to the democratic ideal. This is the case, for example, of the role attributed to the electoral process in the phases of transition from the *ancien régime* to modernity as a means of conferring legitimacy on a new bourgeois political oligarchy selected no longer on the basis of their dynasty and blood, as was the case for the nobility, but of their consensus deriving from vote process. But, in this case, it is a vote

reserved only for the 'deserving' and therefore excludes the vast majority of the population whose involvement in the political process is associated with the possible risks and excesses of revolutionary popular government. The relationship between representation and democracy, therefore, far from being foregone or structured as an inseparable link, lives on an unresolved question that translates into the tension of the relationship between the collective body of the represented and the individual who represents them. This tension can be summed up in the mandate, which is precisely the nexus that holds together this relationship at the very basis of the representative process. But it is a mandate that, to be compatible with democracy, can only be free. This is because any imperativeness of the mandate would subject the representative to the total and unconditional dominion of the contracting party. But at the same time, the mandate must be subject to some form of temperament that allows and organise the possibility of accountability processes by the representatives on the represented to enable them to freely assess the degree to which the representative's actions correspond to the fiduciary bond determined through the mandate. In other words, the mandate needs a structure to organise it: the party, and representative democracy therefore needs political parties to organise the process of representation.

CHAPTER 3.

CRISIS AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL PARTY

INTRODUCTION

Politically, the broad masses do not exist unless they are framed in political parties: the changes of opinion that occur in the masses under the impetus of decisive economic forces are interpreted by the parties, which first break up into tendencies and then split into a multiplicity of new organic parties: through this process of disarticulation, of neo-association, and of fusion between the homogeneous, a deeper and more intimate process of decomposition of democratic society is revealed for the definitive deployment of classes struggle for the preservation or conquest of state power or power over the apparatus of production.

In these few lines taken from an article published by Antonio Gramsci in *'L'Ordine Nuovo'* in September 1921, the main mechanisms of fragmentation and re-aggregation through which political issues arising within society are transferred internally into the democratic machinery through a dynamic process of adaptation at the level of the party system are described with extraordinary clarity. In this sense, and taking up Gramsci's words, it is the changes of opinion determined by the economic forces of a given historical context that determine the conditions of the subsequent adaptive adjustment that occurs in the democratic system through the political parties. The pressure exerted, therefore, first leads to an internal fragmentation of the existing parties and then to the emergence of new parties in order to determine a system that is more consistent with general opinion. In short, this is the mechanism through which the democratic system produces a process of alignment following a phase of crisis, determined by the presence of major issues that the existing parties no longer seem able to represent effectively. In other words, the reference is useful here to introduce the reflection more properly pertaining to the political party referring both to its main historical trends of transformation and, more specifically, to the contemporary situation of profound crisis in relation to the already mentioned post-representative context. In this situation, political parties today seem to be blocked by progressive internal fragmentation and by a level of internal conflict that determines their almost total immobility and the consequent inability to put in place innovative mechanisms capable of consolidating a relationship of trust with the masses, that now seems irremediably compromised.

CRISIS OF THE MASS INTEGRATION PARTY

The 'short century'¹⁸ can also be read as the context that formed the backstage to the historical parable of the mass integration party. Especially with regard to the European context, in fact, the political party presented itself as an element of profound discontinuity from the past. In functional terms, the party has imposed itself over time as the central instrument for mediating and organising citizen participation in the political sphere of modern representative democracies. And it is precisely on the basis of this assumption that Huntington (1975, 100) identifies the political party as 'the distinctive institution of a modern society'. In other words, the party is defined as a particular form of political actor through which "a society of individuals, i.e. stratified into classes, organises in a durable and centralised (but voluntary) way its differences in order to express political representation with consensual resources that are always measurable" (Prospero 2012, 10).

In what can be described as the phase prior to the historical affirmation of the party, i.e. the context that Bernard Manin (1997) has described as notabilarian, it would be more appropriate to speak of factions in parliament rather than parties. The notabil phase of representation is characterised by a low level of political participation, restricted suffrage and the selection of representatives by census. In this context, the party-faction appears as a small aggregate of notables¹⁹ who limit themselves to a representation of interests of a strictly individual kind and who only find convergence after the electoral moment, i.e. in parliament (Neumann 1956). The organisation by census of both representation and access to the right to vote is a characteristic of the "*democracy of the notables*" (Manin, 1997), which in defining a very restricted *body of* those entitled to vote, generates a

¹⁸ Reference is made here to the well-known periodization of the 20th century proposed by the historian Eric J. Hobsbawm in the eponymous essay *The Short Twentieth Century (1994 b)*

¹⁹ The term 'notable' denotes individuals who "a) are able, by virtue of their economic status, to act continuously within a group, directing or administering it - as a secondary profession - without a salary or with an honorary or nominal salary; b) and enjoy a social consideration, no matter on what basis, which gives them the possibility of accepting offices" (Weber 1922, transl. it. 1974, vol. I, 287)

consequent great symmetry of interests and social class between the representative and the represented, which tends to favour the formation and consolidation of personal relations of trust. In this particular context, the phenomenon that has gone down in the news under the name of *transformism* should not, therefore, cause any particular stir given the very weak link that the party-faction is able to establish between representatives and those represented.

Subsequently, the progressive enlargement of suffrage on the one hand and, above all, the introduction of proportional electoral laws on the other, contribute to the increased complexity of the political sphere due to the plurality of interests present. This is a process that in terms of its magnitude and impact makes it completely impossible to establish an exclusively personal link as the exclusive element of the representative relationship. In other words, the sharpening of the deep social fractures inherent in mass society²⁰ can find an outlet at the state level (Rokkan 1970, 176) and has the consequence, among others, that the electoral process tends to organise itself into practices that lead citizens 'no longer to vote for someone they know personally, but for someone who wears the colours of a party'. (*ibid.*) What prevails, therefore, is a way of voting that focuses on those candidates with whom one shares a strong identity and ideological connection, rather than a simple dimension of personal trust. Representation, consequently, becomes increasingly markedly partisan and it is "with the emergence of class fractures that the parties of the notables become technically outdated and mass parties, capable of setting up territorial structures congenial to the necessary social representation are imposed in the places of most heated conflict" (Prospero 2012, 21).

Within the context determined by these profound social changes, the general outlines of a new type of scenario take shape, which Bernard Manin (1998) summarised with the definition of 'party democracy'. In this conception of democracy, the political party takes on the role of the pivotal subject of the entire democratic-representative system,

²⁰ According to the analysis proposed by Stein Rokkan (1970), political parties in different countries are reflexively structured around four fundamental fractures. Two of these fractures are produced by the 'national revolution': (a) centre-periphery, (b) state-church. The other two are produced by the 'industrial revolution': c) city-countryside, d) entrepreneur-worker class.

positioning itself as the link between the state and civil society. In this new context, a new type of elite, consisting of the *party activist* and the *party bureaucrat*, replaced the circles that distinguished the *notables*.

The mass party organises itself as a society within the society, in a process that has been defined by many as 'ecclesiastical', and this certainly because of similarities with some of the structures of the evolution of the organisation of the Catholic church. The relations between the members and the party are based on very solid ties guaranteed by the presence of strong collective identities and the electoral process is organised mainly through dynamics that can be traced back to the dimension of the membership vote in which, precisely, "the people vote for a party rather than for a person" (ibid. p. 231). From the point of view of the definition of collective identity "ideology assumes a fundamental function for the organisation, as it constitutes the long-term interests and, therefore, the very identity of the actors" (della Porta, 2008, 145). Secondly, it is worth emphasising the great care that the mass party takes over the individual socialisation of its members. The latter, in fact, develops over time and within a complex structure that sets itself the task of the total integration of its adherents: the party's organisation 'extends from the cradle to the grave, from the workers' welfare associations to the atheists' crematorium societies [...] the party can count on its adherents; it has taken upon itself a large part of their social existence' (Neumann 1956, 153)

The mass party is not limited, therefore, to organising the struggle for the conquest and management of political power in representative institutions to be fought -only- in the various electoral moments. On the contrary, it thrives on a daily sedimentation of relations and exchanges with and inside the society, thus assuming a function that has often been defined using the metaphor of a sort of '*transmission belt*' between state and civil society. The organisational structure of the mass integration party branches out into cells in workplaces, sections in neighbourhoods and, more generally, through large apparatuses of professional officials whose function it is to organise the daily political process. The party takes the form of a real bureaucratic apparatus often referred to as a 'party-machine'. In other words, the mass party represents "a constant reservoir of participation and value systems" (Calise 2016, 14). These are some of the main phenomena underlying the processes of professionalisation of politics. Unlike the parties

of notables, where the members have their own resources to put at the service of their political initiative, the mass party recruits its leaders from among those individuals who do not necessarily have these resources by themselves. Hence the development of the category that Weber would define as "*professional politicians*" and the consequent "bipartition between those who live *for* politics and those who live *of* politics. Two different types of political action that, in fact, highlight a difference in participation styles starting from economic differences" (Sorice 2014, 120).

It is therefore Weber himself who, reflecting on the crucial role played by parties, also defines them as the only subjects capable of containing the 'emotional elements of politics'. An organised and disciplined party plays an essential function, in his view, in mediating 'street democracy' and curbing potential distortions produced by 'sabotage and similar subversive phenomena'. (Weber 1980, 554) Precisely in this key of interpretation, the political party takes on a decisive constituent role in the consolidation of post-World War II democracies, both contributing directly to the definition of Republican constitutions, and educating huge masses of citizens to democratic participation, playing, in this sense, the essential role of "tenacious builders of social citizenship" (Prospero 2012, 33). This centrality was such that it led Bobbio to define 'the parties as the only subjects authorised to act as intermediaries between the individual and the government' (1991, XVIII). In other words, there was the "ability of the parties to do what, after World War II, seemed impossible in many countries: the organic integration of the masses into the state in a context that was no longer authoritarian, but one of democratic representation of collective demands" (Calise 2016, 14). From the point of view of internal participation, the mass party can be idealised as a structure of concentric circles composed essentially of 5 levels (Crouch in Raniolo 2002: 111).

d) *The core of Leaders and their advisers;*

e) *parliamentary representatives;*

f) *the militants - the people, who are not part of the core, but who are very active in the party or movement and who try to make it grow, to maintain its organisation and to influence its policies; perhaps local level leaders are included here;*

- g) *ordinary members who do not invest much energy in the party, as militants do, but who seek a form of symbolic attachment and - more concretely - who regularly give something in terms of time or money, are likely to pay a membership fee;*
- h) *Outside these circles remain the supporters, or loyal voters, who do not have a formal and continuous link, but who sometimes do something.*

Initially founded as a typical political organisation for the integration of the workers' movement, it then, in some respects, 'infected from the left' other actors in the party system. (Duverger, 1961) And it did so in a context in which, it should be said, "several types of party tend to coexist in the same historical period" (Cotta, Della Porta, Morlino 2008, 219). Within the party landscape there has therefore been a natural and progressive process of adaptation and transformation towards those organisational types that appear more effective in organising the participation of the masses in political life²¹.

However, the solidity of this type of organisation began to show signs of precariousness and progressively entered into crisis. And this happens in a process in which, progressively, "the rooting in the territory is reduced, the bureaucratisation of the apparatuses is weakened, the number of militants declines in favour of simple members and sympathisers, the attention to the voters grows - the boundary between professionals and participants becomes blurred and more complicated. It is blurred because the reduction in the weight of the most active militants and the process of debureaucratisation reduce the availability of active political personnel within the organisation. It is complicated because parties are increasingly turning to the external market of new professionals to fill specialist roles, especially in the communications sector [...], and not to the internal circuit of members" (Raniolo 2002, 112).

PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT

Elaborated and developed in the 1950s by the Michigan school with reference to the American context, the concept of *party identification* has for many years represented a

²¹ See in this sense the concept of *party adaptation* proposed by Dalton, Farrel, McAllister (2011).

functional model for the interpretation of voter behaviour. Especially in a context like the American one, in which the voter is called upon to express his opinion on numerous electoral processes that often go beyond the political sphere, the mechanism of *partisanship* has played, and in part still plays, a very important role as a result of which the party assumes the role of a fundamental agent of ideological simplification. In other words, it performs a heuristic function with respect to the choices that the citizen voter is called upon to make (Miller, 1976). It should be said at the outset that the transposition of a similar concept into the European context appeared to be more difficult. This is due both to the lower number and intensity of elections and, above all, to a party system that is structurally different and anchored in historical fractures that the US experience has only partly known. It is precisely from this perspective that many scholars (see D'Alimonte, De Sio, Maggini 2011) have argued how the concept of *ideological identification* can be more adequate to "explain the mechanism of multiple party identification, according to which many voters declare their closeness to a multiplicity of adjoining parties along a left/right scale" (Trino, p.165 in De Blasio, Sorice 2016). Both *the party identification* elaborated in the *American Voter (1960)*, and the concept of *ideological identification* translated and adapted to the European context, represent functional models for the interpretation of electoral behaviour that allow the latter to be anchored in a relatively stable temporal dimension and, in any case, with characteristics of continuity in the medium to long term.

Since the 1980s, in the studies carried out by Russel Dalton (1997), first with respect to the US context, then with respect to the European context, the presence of a progressive and increasingly significant effect defined as *partisan dealignment* has been underlined. It is a process of significant growth (and discontinuity with the past) of those individuals who no longer identify with a strong link of belonging to a particular political party, but who, at the same time, do not seem to reject democratic institutions as a whole.

In this sense, one of the characteristic effects of the progressive crisis of *partisanship*²² is the overturning of the temporal perspective, in terms of electoral behaviour, of an

²² This is understood as 'the sense of personal attachment that the individual feels to the party of his or her choice' (Campbell 1980).

increasingly significant portion of the electorate. If, in fact, in a context of strong solidity of the relationship of identification between citizen and party, the mechanism of *partisanship* acted as an element of lasting consolidation of this relationship, translating into a vote of belonging rather stable over time, in the same way the loss of centrality of attachment to the party brings with it the effect of making electoral behaviour progressively more volatile, proportionally increasing the incidence of the so-called *floating voters*. In other words, those voters who are willing to change their electoral choices from one election to the next are becoming more and more relevant in a dynamic that sees, as an increasingly important consequence, the shift in electoral behaviour from long-term to short-term factors.

Using the interpretative model proposed by Pippa Norris (2011) and observing the dealignment process from a micro-social perspective, it can be seen that it is profoundly linked to the development and affirmation of post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1990; 1997) as well as to the more general process resulting from the phenomena of "social and geographical mobility and other modernising forces that have weakened the ties between individuals and their communities of reference" (Dalton, Wattenberg 2002, p.11.) It is precisely from this point of view that Dalton himself "frames the phenomenon of dealignment in an evolutionary perspective, according to which party ties undergo a general erosion as a consequence of a social and political modernisation process common to the most advanced industrial societies". (Trino: 165 in De Blasio, Sorice 2016)

With regard to the affirmation of post-materialistic values in the social context of Western democracies, Inglehart's studies (1990,1997) show how, especially in those generations born after the Second World War and raised in a condition of greater well-being and sheltered from conflictual prospects, a progressive weakening of the primary materialistic values placed at the foundation of the "hierarchy of needs²³" had developed. In other words, and unlike in the past, primary materialistic needs are perceived, at least in advanced industrial democracies, as guaranteed and no longer threatened. The result is

²³ The highest needs (intellectual growth, artistic vocation, etc.) can only be achieved once the satisfaction of basic needs (physical survival, i.e. food and some essentials for the pursuit of a dignified life) is guaranteed.

the affirmation of a new hierarchy of post-materialistic values which, in other words, are "also definable as values of an expressive or symbolic type" (Sorice 2014, p 83)

This generational tension is perceptible above all in those generations that went through the movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the crucial years for their own socialisation process (della Porta 2008, p. 87) and is also found in the generations that succeeded them. More recent studies have in fact confirmed this trend and its general translation into a demand for greater participation, net of a context that is outlined in a growing selective distrust of parties. This phenomenon is therefore not accompanied either by a profound lack of interest in politics or by a radical criticism of the democratic system as a whole, to the extent that political participation does not seem to be declining, but on the contrary seeks, and sometimes finds, new forms of participation that the traditional conceptualisation of '*unconventional*' now finds increasingly difficult to enclose and describe precisely. (Diamanti 2007).

On the other hand, from the point of view of traditional participatory processes, electoral loyalties are becoming more and more abstract, and the parties are less and less interested in maintaining a privileged relationship with what could be described as the 'hard core' of militants, members or voters. This is also due to the fact that this link alone is no longer sufficient to guarantee sufficient electoral competitiveness. If, on the one hand, "*cleavages* have ceased to operate as the privileged anchor of the relationship between parties and society. [...] and the right-left continuum has faded considerably" (Calise, 2016, 33) on the other hand, the potential for organisation and mobilisation guaranteed to the mass party through the process of building collective identities, anchored on classical social cleavages, is no longer sufficient.

The more the so-called independent voters grow in importance, i.e. those no longer anchored to long-term identifications or to a strong common identity, the greater the parties' attempt to convince this particular type of electorate, which is often sensitive to *issue-oriented* campaigns. In order to succeed in this task, the structure of militancy rooted in the territory is no longer sufficient, and indeed is increasingly becoming an unnecessary and burdensome burden. It is perceived less and less as the essential functional protuberance for understanding the needs of the electoral body, also because

of the increasingly consistent use of opinion polls. The traditional 'antennas' of the party of mass integration, constituted by the capillary network of the intermediate bureaucracy, are gradually being replaced by the polls in a process that does nothing more than dismantle the 'intermediate circles' of the party structure that stand between the core of the leadership and the voters. It is a process of dismantling social relations, presences and human relations, the consequences of which are progressively unravelling. As Manin (1997) rightly points out, the mass party can no longer find internally the necessary resources for this type of disintermediated dialectic between the leadership and the electorate but must resort to polls and new figures from outside the party apparatus, such as '*media experts*'. In this sense, the combined use of the ever-increasing and relevant use of opinion polls and external consultants hired for the organisation of the leader's/party's media prominence override and make the intermediate structures of militancy even more superfluous. The party tends to transform itself and its political line adapting to this new context by taking on a less rigid form, capable of orienting itself according to changing needs. This is the background to the elaboration of the theoretical model of the '*catch all party*'.

In this transformative context, what we might call a more general phase of dealignment consolidates, i.e. "a period during which the share of the electorate affiliated with parties shrinks in parallel with the dissolution of traditional party coalitions" (Dalton, 1984, p. 14) and "electoral alignments weaken, and party systems experience greater fragmentation and electoral volatility" (ibid. p. 451). Finally, with regard to the systemic consequences of the processes described above, Norris points out that the general effects of these phenomena can translate into a *democratic deficit* to the "extent that citizens' aspirations for democracy are misaligned with the satisfaction with which democracy itself functions" (Norris, 2011, p. 2). It is a deficit that Norris herself derives from "the interaction between rising expectations, negative events and failed performance" (ibid., p. 3) of the organisers of democracy. In other words, it is clear that the long-term effects of dealignment processes are not limited exclusively to a change in the attitudes of voters with regard to the electoral process but go beyond it by assuming systemic effects that call into question the individual representative institutions. In this sense, the form of the traditional mass integration party is entering a phase of increasing crisis.

COGNITIVE MOBILISATION

The historical and conceptual framework in which the phenomenon of ideological dealignment is inserted, as seen above, is that of a profound social upheaval marked by the leading role played by generations born after the Second World War and within the context of modern industrialised democracies. Net of differences and internal fractures assume vary from country to country, what is common to all is the progressive development of the average education of the population and, therefore, the average progress of the cognitive capacities of individual citizens. But what are the consequences, in terms of political participation, of an electorate that is on average more educated than in the past, that has great ease of access to information and that appears increasingly interested in politics (or in the representation they receive from the media system), but at the same time is less and less tied to the structure of the parties as organising agents of the democratic process?

If, on the one hand, Huntington already identified, in some respects, the process of growth in the cognitive skills of individuals as a sort of secondary-hand potential threat to democracy, on the other, Ronald Inglehart in 1977 wrote about a 'silent revolution' taking place in the electoral body, which he translated into the elaboration of the concept of *cognitive mobilisation*. The distinctive element of this conceptualisation was identified by him as the fact that more and more citizens were developing the "skills needed to manipulate political abstractions and -hence- to coordinate the activities necessary to deal with a large political community" regardless of the need for a structured relationship through political parties (1977, pp. 295-297).

A few years later, Russell Dalton too, starting from the awareness of a progressive crisis of public confidence in traditional parties, observed, first in the United States and then also in Europe, the characteristics of *cognitive mobilisation* in vast segments of the electorate. The increasingly pronounced affirmation of the characteristics of the concept of cognitive mobilisation, from his point of view, "is based on two distinct phenomena: on the one hand, the ability of citizens to process political information, which has grown in direct proportion to their level of education and political sophistication; on the other, the reduced cost of acquiring political information, following the expansion of the mass media" (2007, p. 76).

From this perspective, the process of ideological dealignment is described as one of the possible consequences of a sort of evolutionary process that, with the passing of the generations, sees the progressive affirmation of the aforementioned post-materialistic values and the increasingly marked unwillingness, particularly in the younger generations, to accept of being part of hierarchically organised structures. All this takes place in a context in which "the increase in the average level of education and the growing availability of information made available by the media reduce the cost of acquiring it and meet an electorate that is increasingly interested in politics and less and less functionally bound by party constraints". (Sorice, Trino 2014, p. 66) Thus, the increase in the level of political sophistication of citizens presents itself as a decisive factor in favouring the increasing number of independent voters on the one hand, and in consequently weakening the link between parties and citizen voters on the other. In other words, it is clear that "attributing the weakening of party ties exclusively to forms of social apathy or, in parallel, to forms of depoliticisation [...] means failing to take into account a vast segment of the electorate that manifests participation dynamics that are alternative to party dynamics and that respond to cognitive mobilisation mechanisms" (ibid. p. 64).

From the intersection between cognitive mobilisation and level of party identification Dalton derives a specific taxonomy (see Table 01) in which "the degree of attachment to the party and cognitive mobilisation define different categories of citizens who show very different electoral behaviours" (Sorice, 2014, p. 85).

Table no. 01 Type of mobilisation and party identification (source: Dalton, 2007)		
Cognitive mobilisation	Independents	Weak/strong PID
<i>High</i>	<i>Apartisans</i>	<i>Cognitive Partisans</i>
<i>Low</i>	<i>Apoliticals</i>	<i>Ritual Partisans</i>

First of all, the so-called '*apoliticals*' are defined, i.e. voters characterised by a minimum level of political sophistication and, at the same time, a low level of *party identification*. In his 2007 study of the American electorate comparing the period 1964/2004, Dalton does not find substantial differences²⁴. Then come the "*ritual partisans*", those who present a low level of political sophistication accompanied by a high level of party identification and who represent the category that has undergone the most significant variations: from 47.1% in the period 1964-66 to 26% in the period 2000-04, confirming the marked weakening of party identification in the US context. Thirdly, the "*Cognitive Partisans*" define voters who have the resources, in terms of political and/or economic sophistication, to be able to process political information net of the indications of the party as an agent of ideological simplification, but who at the same time maintain a very marked party identification. Finally, the typology that represents the most interesting element in the taxonomy proposed by Dalton: the "*apartisans*". Having grown from 10% to 19.9% in the two surveys done, *apartisans* represent an increasingly important segment of the population who, while possessing a high degree of political sophistication, refuse any link of identification with political parties. In this sense, we are defining a type of electorate that is becoming increasingly important (both in terms of numbers and in terms of potential participation) and to which the traditional forms of organising political participation do not seem to be adequate to offer convincing answers. In other words, it is "a citizenship endowed with autonomous cognitive and economic resources, which allow the adoption of styles of critical consumption (political and otherwise)". (Sorice, Trino 2014 p. 68). This, it should be emphasised, does not mean that we are dealing with a typology of apathetic voters who reject any form of participation. On the contrary, the new *apartisans* seem to respond to *cause-oriented* participatory activities in the field of politics based on the pursuit of specific *issues*. (Norris 2007), but they no longer recognise themselves in traditional ideological families or, more generally, they do not see parties as reliable actors inspired by the pursuit of the collective interest of society.

Similar conceptual elaboration of what Dalton calls *apartisans* can be recalled here in what Norris calls '*critical citizens*' (2011). This definition refers to those citizens who show

²⁴ In the two surveys, the number of voters rose from 16% to 18.8%.

commitment and support for democracy as a system, but who at the same time demonstrate an increasing tendency to criticise the concrete ways in which the democratic process is organised. It is, therefore, a group of citizens who do not criticise democracy per se, but rather the way in which it is presented and the way in which its traditional institutions are organised. Hence the fact that "political participation for those subjects who are more "cognitively mobilised" tends to move from the aggregative framework of the parties to very differentiated forms". (Sorice 2014, p. 82). In other words, "increasingly educated and informed citizens tend to acquire 'antibodies' towards traditional politics, delegitimised by a crisis of trust affecting politicians and institutions" (Ibid. p. 84). In this context, in which the population groups with a high degree of political sophistication are growing, increasingly negative judgments are also developing towards political personnel. The so-called *practitioners*, i.e. those who hold public office or play a leading role in political parties, are victims of depoliticising tendencies that consider them increasingly inadequate to their task, to the point of preferring the work of competent technicians. This process is also undoubtedly facilitated and fuelled by the fact that, as the process of selecting the ruling classes operated by the mass party has been greatly weakened, "the personalistic and leaderistic recruiting of the political ruling classes favours the rise of people who are 'loyal to the leader' but do not necessarily have an appropriate 'curriculum vitae' and often not even the slightest territorial roots" (Ibid.). Increasingly, political personnel are diluted in a process of communicating vessels with the ancillary world of the economic and financial elite. And it is in this context that we can better understand the processes of '*sliding doors*' between the world of political personnel and the future professional employment of those same personnel within large multinational companies or lobbying firms.

Returning to the perspective proposed by Dalton, therefore, citizens with a higher level of cognitive mobilisation, on the one hand, increase their distrust of the political class, while on the other, they continue to have a positive view of the democratic institution with respect to which they clamour for greater possibilities of access and participation through practices that are not the exclusive preserve of the traditional hierarchical organisational agencies characteristic of 'party democracy'. These processes represent a tendency common to advanced industrial democracies in particular and may be more or less

accentuated depending on the conditions of greater or lesser stability of the party system and the state of functioning of certain fundamental nodes of the institutional architecture, such as the way in which representatives are elected through electoral laws.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA, THE PROCESS OF MEDIATISATION

The processes of dealignment, if on the one hand contribute to reducing the solidity of the links between citizens and political parties, on the other hand contribute to amplifying the process of fragmentation of public opinion and the one of the public sphere. These new partisanships, which very often lack solid electoral ties , as we have seen, can no longer be reached simply through the capillary and traditional structures of the mass party, since they are increasingly weakened by the progressive crisis of *membership*. In the internal structure of the parties, in fact, "tensions grew further as the leadership became convinced that the base guaranteed by the loyal electorate had become too narrow and began to look around for votes in the overall electoral pool" (Crouch, 2003, 80).

But if it is true, as Peter Dahlgren (1995) affirmed, that the practices of democracy have always had a strong link with those of communication, it must be stressed that this process takes place within a media context that has changed profoundly and is characterised by an extremely mediatised social context. In other words, there is a process, facilitated by the technological revolution, which has affected and affects not only politics, but the entire field of social activities with respect to the fact that the media represent the filter through which society comes into contact with practically all the main aspects of social life. As far as politics is concerned, 'the media directly convey political communication without intermediary filters' (Raniolo, 2002, 186).

The consequences of such a process for political parties seem clear: "political elites have less incentive to build - or preserve - mass parties and prefer to mobilise the electorate through the mass media" (Dalton 2011, 215). Consequently, a close reciprocal relationship between media and politics develops in which, "in order to secure their presence in the media (and exploit their potential for influence), politicians accept to lose

part of their autonomy and to adjust their behaviour to the needs of the media spectacle; the media provide an aura of visibility and attention to those political actors who best meet their needs to intercept and retain audiences" (Sorice 2014, 97). We are thus witnessing the progressive integration of the entertainment industry into the field of politics. It is, in this case, a kind of self-feeding vicious circle in which political leaders need the media to communicate with segments of the population they could otherwise no longer reach; the media need politicians to entertain, and hopefully increase their *audience* and satisfy the growing demand for political spectacle. The more this relationship consolidates, the more it contributes to structuring the dynamics of the spectacularisation of politics within a context that sees the permanent electoral campaign as one of its distinctive features.

Politics and its main actors, therefore, by adopting many of the operating practices of the media spectacle are profoundly transformed by it. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the temporal logic of television, which has imposed itself in the political sphere. In this sense, a veritable 'logic of efficiency' is affirmed as regards the relationship between the political decision and the time needed to take it, which must be shorter and shorter because of a more direct communicability. And this is often to the detriment of the quality of deliberation and the very rules of operation of democratic elected assemblies, which by their very nature require long time frames. In other words, if "the media become one of the privileged places for the conflict of ideas" (Ibid., p. 98). (ibid., p. 98), then many of the 'times necessary for politics' to address (and in theory resolve) these conflicts (from mediation to reflection or in-depth reasoning) gradually become incompatible with staying on the scene. Dynamics that are often forcefully conflictual, extremely rapid and capable of attracting attention in the contingent moment of a shot are established. Political debate faces a dynamic of both simplification and popularisation, becoming a 'form of communication that resembles neither the ordinary language of the man in the street nor the language used in real political discussions' (Crouch 2003, 32). While these phenomena allow a wider public to access political information than in the past, they also tend to favour the risk of *dumbing down*²⁵. With regard to the latter phenomenon, two

²⁵ "The term indicates the way in which the media describe political events, effectively placing them alongside the stories of popular mass culture. Since the self-representation of politics seems to be consistent

considerations should be made. If on the one hand the process of popularising political contents lowers the level of communication and perhaps the quality of the contents, on the other hand it contributes to making political information more accessible to sections of the population that in reality would be completely unreachable in other more sophisticated forms.

In some respects, it is the very role of politicians that is changing, i.e. what they are required to do to be politicians, namely to play a stage role in the political spectacle. The communication relationship that is created is a profoundly disintermediated one and its stand between the political leader and the vastness of the potential audience that can be reached through the media. In this sense, in order to favour the creation of real relationships of emotional connection, significant personalisation dynamics are affirmed from the point of view of communication. The latter translate into what Thompson (1995) defined as a 'new form of intimacy' based no longer on direct knowledge, but on mediatisation phenomena. In this sense, "the leader's very trustworthiness depends on his personal life, his sympathy and even his charisma" (Sorice 2012, 82). The political leader, therefore, is inclined to increasingly divest himself of his private life in order to appear more trustworthy, not so much from a political point of view, but primarily from a personal one. Characters such as wives and children, who used to be relegated to the private sphere, appear on the scene, and so aspects of the private sphere, such as scandals -especially of a sexual nature- consequently become issues that enter the political sphere (Thompson 1995).

THE NEW ROLE OF STAFF

In order to better manage this close, and in some ways unprecedented, relationship between politics and the media, parties increasingly tend to use external personnel who have little or nothing to do with the party's own values and identity. This accentuates the deformation, already widely present and previously described, of the relationship within

with this process, several scholars believe that political communication is undergoing a process of cultural 'degradation'". (Sorice 2011, 116)

the party and affirms what Manin (1997) has symbolically described as the centrality of the '*media expert*' charged with the duty of presenting the leader in a positive light in the eyes of the electorate. The risk of a potential drift of increasingly relevant aspects of political communication into so-called political²⁶ *marketing* is thus apparent. In other words, it is another face of the transfer of logic from non-political spheres to the political one in the aforementioned process of dilution of the Public Sphere. In this case, the tendency is to define the political dimension as if it were a market in which "persuasion as a specialised craft" becomes a functional practice for the realisation of "a party programme that is a 'product' and that politicians try to 'sell' us their message" (Crouch 2003, 32).

"The '*media expert*' takes on ever greater prominence to the detriment of the party official²⁷ and, from a broader perspective, there is a tendency towards a general superordination of the staff structures over the party leadership groups in a framework that, from an organisational point of view, presents itself in terms of a progressive leadership. As a result, the combined effect of personalisation in terms of communication and leadership and in terms of organisation favours a general tendency to increasingly verticalise relations within the party. Structures are increasingly being transformed into those of an electoral machine or, better, into a real *campaign party*. This particular conceptualisation of the notion of the party is on the one hand at the service of the leader and his electoral success, but on the other hand it tends to be dependent on the leader since it is who represents the main communicative resource within the permanent electoral campaign.

It is precisely on the basis of the importance of the relations between politics and the media system that Bernard Manin (1997) theorises the transition from a 'democracy of parties' to a 'democracy of the public', in which the logic of portrayal would prevail over

²⁶ The risk inherent in the emergence of political marketing logic lies in the peculiarities of advertising. The risk inherent in the emergence of political marketing logic lies in the peculiarities of advertising, which, referring to Crouch, 'is not a form of rational dialogue: it does not demonstrate with evidence, but associates its products with a particular set of images. It does not allow for replication: its purpose is not to provoke discussion, but to induce purchase' (2003, 33).

²⁷ Central figure in the context of party democracy described by Manin (1997)

that of representation. In this process, it is the very notion of the people that is transformed into the notion of public, understood in this sense as "the spectator of a show staged by media technicians and acted out by political figures" (Fabbrini 1999, p. 36). Consequently, the "mediatised public space tends to be enclosed within the framework of the media, which thus become, de facto, the places of portrayal of politics" (Sorice 2012, 89). At the same time, polls become essential tools both for understanding the main *issues* of the electorate and for producing a more general effect of portrayal of political reality. But if on the one hand the reduction of the distance between politicians and citizens favours a greater knowledge of the former on the part of the latter, it does not seem to contribute to a greater participation of citizens in politics. On the contrary, the process described above seems to be essentially limited to the transformation of political leaders into celebrities who respond to the logic of entertainment. In other words, in an accomplished 'democracy of the public', the spaces for participation regress in the face of a clear prevalence of the logic of portrayal offered by the media over that of representation.

PRESIDENTIALISATION AND THE CARTEL PARTY

Despite the fact that the crisis of confidence in the party appears, in some respects, to be irreversible, it would be wrong to think that the parties have disappeared. On the contrary, in modern industrialised democracies, political parties still play a decisive role both in the processes of selecting the ruling class and in the management of power deriving from the results of electoral and representative processes. What is taking shape "is the decline of a democratic way of being of the political party, a decline that is manifested by the shrinking to the point of disappearance of its peripheral structure" (Urbinati 2013, 162). The crisis of membership, and the loss of centrality of the members in the party's internal organisational processes, contributes to the disappearance of those subjects of militancy that are most active and able to read the political reality and then convey it, through channels of representation, to the vast group of representatives. In other words, the diffuse actors who had contributed as an essential part to the construction and smooth running of a collective project are missing. At the same time, the

deep fractures around which the parties had organised and sedimented their collective identities, as well as weakening as a result of the effects examined above, are showing deep signs of incompatibility with the dynamics of personalised leaderships that are now widespread. From this point of view, in fact, 'cleavages feed the parties thanks to their diffusion and rooting in time and space. This is the opposite of personalised leaderships, which are characterised by the volatility and precariousness of biographical events and by the fact that they aim to aggregate consensus across the widest possible spectrum of the electorate' (Calise 2016, 33).

Deprived of internal instruments capable of capturing and translating society's deepest moods, the party leadership has no choice but to resort increasingly to professional staff and increasingly sophisticated opinion polls. These practices, if in a first phase they contribute to further reducing the weight of the surviving intermediate levels, in a systemic perspective favour the structuring of a regime of *permanent campaigns* "which is the other face of the democracy of the public" (Calise 2016, 139). This defines a "new kind of relationship between parties/leaders and citizens and consensus building" (Sorice 2012, 108).

In this internal party state of affairs and with the affirmation of an increasingly mediatised context, what Sergio Fabbrini (1999) has defined as 'democratic principles' become fundamental organisational resources that are increasingly difficult to do without. In other words, the 'partyocratic era has come to an end and parties can only survive by putting themselves at the service of a leader' (Calise 2016, 7). From the point of view of organisation, in fact, parties tend to undergo transformations that go in the direction of placing themselves as an instrument at the disposal of a leader and legitimising his presence on the scene by contributing to making them the "heart of political representation: the leader represents the people, acts in their name and in their interest" (Campus, 2006, 33-4). The consequent dynamic is ambivalent, on the one hand "the personalisation of party communication strengthens the leader externally, transforming him into the main repository of electoral appeal" (Calise 2016, 19) and on the other "it also consolidates his primacy vis-à-vis the internal organisation, which becomes increasingly subordinate to the leader" (ibid). Therefore, the dynamic of communicative personalisation produces, with respect to the political party, both external and internal

effects, contributing to the consolidation of the verticalisation processes of its structure. In other words, "the leader conquers the baton of command (also) through his weight in the media circuits of consensus" (Ibid., 27).

It is a fact that 'the erosion of the party-organisation has not meant the end of the party, but the end of a party', i.e. a 'heavy party based on organisation [...] half inside and half outside state institutions, a hinge between state and society' (ibid.). In this sense, parties have proved to be very adaptive political subjects. Having lost the splendour of the party of mass integration, the parties have faced a general slimming down of their internal structure in favour of an increasingly direct relationship between a leadership inserted in the logic of the media spectacle, and an increasingly fragmented public, which is the electoral body of citizens. Political parties have gradually lost some of their function as a 'transmission belt' between civil society and the state and have become entrenched within the latter in a defensive inertia of acquired positions. In other words, the party is increasingly transformed and adapted into a party within the institutions, contributing to the affirmation of a democracy *of* parties and no longer *by* parties (Urbinati 2014). It is precisely this process of increasingly deep rooting at the level of state institutions that has also been identified by Leonardo Morlino as the cause of the failure of democratic consolidation or progressive democratic un-anchoring (Morlino 2006, 2011).

Katz and Mair, in a well-known article published in 1995, described the evolution of the political party with respect to relations with the state in the sense of the affirmation of a new model of party that they called the *cartel party*. In this perspective, the transformative process of political parties would be characterised by the incentive of the traditional parties, already rooted in the institutional system, to settle and defend their positions of power in the institutions. Less and less able to represent a reliable synthesis of the relationship of representation, the traditional parties would still find themselves performing their function, but in a sort of "state of siege" in which, outside the institutions and favoured by the processes of fragmentation of representation, new demands are organised and new actors apply to enter the institutional system. The tendency, in this sense, would therefore be that of a collusive and inertial dynamic that pushes the parties already present on the scene to form cartels that act both to make the entry of new actors into the system more complex and to encourage consociative practices within the public

institutions. This would also explain the progressive flattening of many party political programmes, which are increasingly similar to each other and characterised by the presence of proposals that tend to avoid deep conflict dynamics. Political power is becoming more and more an end to be controlled and not an instrument at the service of programmatic proposals, in a general trend that focuses more on the quest for self-preservation than radical social change. This process tends to take the form of a dynamic of mutual collusion between many of the major existing parties, which join forces in an attempt to cut the costs of possible electoral defeat and to exclude new subjects from entering the competition. There is therefore a shift "from parties in government, which dominate thanks to parliamentary discipline, to parties in government that merely condition policies or appointments". (Fabbrini, 1999, 234).

It is clear, in this sense, that political parties in their dimension of functional instruments to the democratic organisation of competition for political power, are not facing their inexorable decline, but rather are going through phases of adaptation to the new post-democratic context that is being defined in advanced democracies. The technological revolution, the increasingly imposing role assumed by the processes of mediatisation of politics, and the emergence of a context that can be synthetically defined with the concept of 'democracy of the public' (Manin 1997) are all phenomena that bring with them new challenges for political parties, which, as actors of participation, have always stood out for their ability to adapt to new scenarios. In this sense, therefore, the parties continue to play a strategic and decisive role in the democratic process of organising political power. However, as a result of the most recent transformations, they are seen less and less as exclusive places of political participation, due to their progressive loss of relationship in the social sphere and their increasing incardination within the state. Political participation, like a karst river, is increasingly declining into unconventional forms and practices that parties are no longer able to fully intercept or represent. In this regard, Pippa Norris (2011), reflecting on the political consequences of the emergence of the knowledge society, notes a general strengthening of so-called 'non-traditional' participation and, more generally, of citizens' civic engagement. We are therefore faced with the emergence of a mixed system, in which the parties remain fundamental players in the management

of power processes at an institutional level, but, unlike in the past, they are less and less those exclusive subjects within which political participation found its fullest sense.

The political party, therefore, if on the one hand it has largely transformed itself into a structure anchored in the ganglia of the state, on the other hand it remains at present, and net of the transformations of both representative democracy and participatory practices, the main (and in many contexts the only) instrument for the selection of political personnel and the management of the power that follows. This is because "the parliamentary structure, as historical experience and the writings of Hans Kelsen have taught us, cannot be kept alive without parties and, we would add, without parties being associations of citizens, not just of elected representatives (as cartel parties are today)" (Urbinati 2016, 989). At the same time, it is undoubtedly the case that, in the development of the cartelisation process itself, the interest of party leaderships in organising and legitimising forms of active political participation has been gradually thinning. In this sense, organisational incentives have gradually disappeared, replaced by a mediatised context that has made possible to reach millions of citizens directly, i.e. disintermediately, without necessarily having to resort to a capillary structure rooted in the territory. But, as noted above, this phenomenon of slimming down the political party in its traditional relationship with civil society has not resulted in a general and pervasive apathy of citizens towards politics. In other words, "even if they no longer stimulate ongoing participation with mobilising myths and take on the appearance of obscure power cartels, parties remain the instrument with which a political system secures the possibility of the governance of innovation" (Prospero 2012, 199). Certainly, trust in the political class has suffered major setbacks, with differences that vary from country to country. In the same way, the traditional practices associated with the context of party democracy (Manin 1997), including the vote of belonging, widespread *membership*, identification in a collective project supported by an ideological narrative, have been greatly weakened. All these dimensions have gradually taken on residual roles and functions. But rather than a crisis in the apocalyptic sense of the taxonomy proposed by Koselleck (2003), which should in time lead us to a sort of "party final" (Revelli, 2013) or to a *Partyless Democracy* (Mair, 2016), what we are witnessing seems better described as a process of

transformation, or rather adaptation, of the political party within the more general contemporary crisis and, in particular, that of representation.

The party, in fact, has not disappeared, nor does it appear to be about to be replaced by other types of instruments; on the contrary, it has shown itself to be an entity capable of adapting -and transforming- itself to the new context. We are not interested here in expressing a value judgement on this process of *party adaptation* (Dalton et. 2011). However, it is a fact that today the political party in the 'democracy of the public' (Manin 1997) no longer represents a self-sufficient form of participation, capable of combining and synthesising within itself both the political participation of a considerable number of citizens, and the dynamics of *accountability* linked to the representative process, as well as the medium-term construction of a transformative agenda for society. If ever there was a dimension of 'self-sufficiency' of the party model in historical reality, today this situation, especially from the point of view of political participation, is nothing more than a myth. In fact, and with an ever-increasing degree of incidence especially in the younger generations, the dynamics of participation are increasingly shifting from civic-oriented to cause-oriented activities²⁸.

In this sense, movements, in their most varied forms and dynamics of mostly extemporaneous action, are assuming increasingly important roles. And new party models have emerged on the political scene. In this sense, the Internet, with all its limitations and opportunities and net of a digital divide that is still largely present²⁹ (De Blasio, 2012), has given access to new ways and possibilities of political participation, or at least those that are able to facilitate it³⁰. Consequently, even in a situation that should be read in its greater complexity, "it is by no means a given that parties are useless or outdated and, likewise, it is not true that the only 'winning' party model is the one that is

²⁹ Structurally organised along two axes, the generational axis, with respect to which there is greater difficulty of access for older people, and the geographical axis, with respect to which the peripheries and less developed areas of individual countries show clear delays in accessing what is now, to all intents and purposes, a right.

³⁰ This is the case with the online participation platforms that have developed in recent years (De Blasio, 2016).

substantiated as an electoral committee (more or less personal, liquid and perhaps presidentialised)". (Sorice 2015, 137). It emerges, therefore and once again, "the party form and with it the methods of internal discussion and decision-making" (ibid.). Is a different model for the political party possible? In other words, a model that is able to take into account from the outset both the crisis of credibility that the parties have undergone and the structural changes that have taken place in the processes of participation? The central point of this possibility lies essentially in the premise of whether it is possible to overturn the logic, now widespread, that sees the political party as a close circle, in a dynamic that is essentially that of a management of power that is often an end in itself. If this is, in extreme synthesis, the watchword of the progressive transformation of parties into *cartel parties*, then the spaces for a reflection on a different model of political party can only start from the affirmation of a function of the party as a means and instrument for the management of power on the basis of a platform of values and not as an end in itself for accessing and staying *in* power. In this sense, Raniolo (2013) identifies four "main problems" that concern the organisational dynamics of parties:

- a) *problem of collective action, i.e. the motivations for participation, the practices of organising membership and issues related to militancy more generally;*
- b) *coordination problem, i.e. aspects concerning the nature of the organisation's structure;*
- c) *The problem of mobilising resources, both economic and symbolic, as well as relations with lobbying, spin doctors and leadership;*
- d) *strategic problem, i.e. choices that are functional to the conquest of consensus.*

Addressing these issues today is a necessity that can no longer be put off. But in order to do so from a different perspective from the *mainstream*, "it is necessary for parties to stop wanting to be the sole custodians of political commitment and to enter into a connection with social movements (without having hegemonic pretensions) and with the experiences of active citizenship. In other words, the parties must have the courage to change their nature and succeed in recovering the participation-identity nexus within the framework of a social system in which the very forms of politics have profoundly changed". (Sorice 2014, 139).

It may be useful, in this regard, to refer briefly to the relationship between representative democracy and participatory democracy. This should not be read as organised along a caesura that cannot be healed, nor as an attempt by the latter to replace the former. On the contrary, participatory dynamics are structured as an element of continuity in the democratic process between an election and the next one. In other words, they accompany the forms of representation, complementing them in those components that are today unprotected due to the crisis of the political parties and, therefore, in the final analysis, helping to strengthen them.

In this possibility of development for democracy, "there is no need to delegitimise intermediate bodies but, on the contrary, to make them grow and make them strong, obviously no longer mere 'intermediaries' in a vertical relationship between the rulers and the governed, but frames within which horizontal processes of exchange and democratic participation are implemented" (Sorice 2014, 173).

From this contextual perspective, political communication has often been relegated to the role of a mere form of propaganda, generally to the advantage of established power. This point is all the more present as a consequence of the increasingly close and intricate link between the dimension of politics and that of the media in a situation increasingly characterised by a strong pervasiveness of spectacle -and spectacularization- as one of the main *frame of* politics. At the same time, "the most optimistic hypotheses on the 'liberating' role of digital media -and of the web in particular- seem today to have been greatly rethought" (ibid.).

However, new forms of participation can develop, and new forms of democracy emerge accordingly as time goes by. But in order for all this to take place and produce concrete effects on the current state of affairs, it is not enough simply to have architectures, engagement strategies, technological innovations or modern *civic engagement* platforms. What is needed is a real overturning of the cultural perspective within which communication can play a decisive role in activating what Gramsci defined as the intellectual's *sentimental connection* with the people. In this case, it would not be a question of Gramsci's collective intellectual, i.e. the party, but of a more general perspective of effective connection between theory and practice of action, i.e. an "organic

process capable of linking the spontaneous dimension of political commitment with the projectual logic of direction" (ibid.).

For this process to take place, new intermediate bodies are needed that can once again activate a transformative dynamic of reality. It is necessary to break the mould imposed by the dominant paradigm that sees the instruments of social mediation as useless trappings of slow and inefficient decision-making. Far from considering any reflection on the end of history as practicable (Fukuyama 1992), we have to assume that we are therefore going through a long phase of transition.

INTERNAL CONFLICT

In reflecting on the political party in the paradigm of the crisis, addressing problems of an organisational nature is certainly important, but at the same time it may not be sufficient. Political parties, as Davis (2019) points out, increasingly seem to be immobilised by a process that sees them break up internally into trends or fractions and which results in their inability to implement innovative actions. In this sense, therefore, it seems necessary to reflect on the processes of internal party democracy, that is, on how parties live and operate in the selection of their leaderships and, more generally, in the day-to-day relationship with what remains of their structure. In other words, it seems appropriate to pay greater attention to the dimension of internal participatory practices and the role that internal conflict plays in conditioning political party and its actions.

From this point of view, in fact, in the midst of the crisis of membership and the dismantling of the party's intermediate structures, the attempt to broaden participation - that is, the *selectorate*- as regards the audience of those entitled to participate in the choice of leaderships seems not to have borne the desired fruit. The idea behind these attempts was essentially to offer a more solid legitimisation of both the leader and the party. The latter process indirectly, due to the centrality of the leader himself in the media spectacle. The most striking example of this is the introduction of primaries elections open to the participation of non-members for the selection of internal bureaucracy and, more generally, the tendency to use tools of this type to resolve dynamics of competition and

internal conflict. If, on the one hand, there has been a gradual decline in participation in these same processes, the novelty of which has rapidly disappeared, on the other, it does not seem that these tools have led to tangible forms of innovation with respect to the internal dynamics of conflict. On the contrary, there seems to have been a simple transformation of the established logics of conflict into a new operational scenario. The internal struggle for power within the party acquired a new instrument to be traced back to the same logic, but with the possibility of attracting a larger number of voters. *In* many cases, therefore, the increase in participation in the process of selecting political elites became a different means of carrying out the exact same struggle between party oligarchies that took place in the indirect process of the concentric circle structure typical of traditional parties (Papadopulos, 2013). From this point of view, the primaries, in their European variant, have led to a simple modification of the battleground between elites where the leadership was contestable and the competition heated; and to a practice with strong plebiscitary connotations where the leadership elected through this method was no longer contestable. As Raniolo states (2013), "part of this ambivalence derives from the short-circuit between the verticalisation or, if you prefer, the presidentialisation of parties and the direct election of the leader, so that paradoxically, their legitimisation from below ends up widening the gap between the power they have and the responsibility - or rather the internal controls to which they should be subject". In essence, the referendum on leadership, which was put into play through open primaries of members and sympathisers³¹, does not seem to have succeeded in addressing and resolving such a complex issue as that of restoring meaning to the party's internal structures or modifying the conflictual logic that has contributed to its paralysis. On the contrary, the excess of practices of this nature risks contributing even more to the weakening of the very structures that were intended to be strengthened. From this point of view, studies on political participation have shown how it is shifting from a *civic-oriented* dimension to a predominantly cause-oriented one. This phenomenon, as observed in many generational

³¹ This is the case of the 'Italian-style' primaries first proposed in 2005 to legitimise Romano Prodi's coalition leadership and then adopted by the Partito Democratico since its foundation in 2007. The Partito Democratico's primaries are in fact open to all registered members and voters on condition that they sign a simple declaration of intent to certify their status as 'democratic voters'.

studies, is particularly present in the younger generations. Part of the success of some of the most recent movements, in fact, can be explained in these terms, namely also thanks to their ability to structure themselves around specific issues and to orient their actions towards that objective, stimulating a selective type of participation. Such practices have considerable organisational incentives. Choosing to orient one's structure and actions around the many facets of a single cause allows one to gather and mobilise people who share that specific cause and may disagree with many others. These practices are particularly widespread in protest movements, in which the aggregative factor resides precisely in the sharing of a fundamental opposition to a more or less defined issue and in the common perspective of acting so that this may be eliminated. From this we can deduce how, from the point of view of their subjective motivation, participatory practices must increasingly be sustained by the conviction of a transformative sense of reality. In other words, there must be in the agent who chooses to take part, the awareness that their action can count for something and have a concrete impact on the reality around them. Action, therefore, acquires meaning to the extent that it is part of a process that is capable of producing effects. As long as the mobilising factor could count on a basis of values and ideology, much of the meaning of participatory actions was provided, precisely, by the symbolic armoury of ideology. The individual actions, in that contextual framework, were part of a more general mechanism which was able to offer a framework of contextual reasons for participation. Militant action was therefore motivated to a large extent by the ideological promise that a slow, constant and - above all - collective political struggle would have led to the affirmation of concrete changes, positive because they were consistent with the path traced on the way to a final objective that, even if not concretely attainable, nevertheless represented a social ideal to strive for. The party models that have emerged in the transition to public democracy generally share a low regard for their membership base, which in many cases can even come to be perceived as a kind of obstacle to the smooth functioning of a vertically and electorally driven party machine. This phenomenon is all the truer for those parties of the socialist and social democratic tradition, the closest heirs of the tradition of the mass integration party and political subjects for which there is still today a certain dimension of friction represented by a presence, albeit residual, of intermediate structures. In this sense, a membership of this kind is in many ways an inertial membership, increasingly older than the age groups

involved and continuing an almost tacit path of membership renewal, almost as a gesture of loyalty to what once was rather than what will or could be.

Any reflection on *membership* cannot, therefore, ignore the need to give concrete meaning to the actions of those who actively participate in the political process. A theory of *membership* whose purpose in the general economy of the party lies in mere testimony or commentary on choices made elsewhere will be less and less viable. Today, however, this process is widespread. The context of a permanent electoral campaign, as well as the strong mediatisation of political debate and the centrality of practices of portrayal over those of representation, leads the party member to feel as much a passive spectator of the political spectacle as those who are not members. From this point of view, it is clear that it is necessary to reflect on the underlying reasons for motivating political participation within parties and on the tools and practices in which it is or can be organised. In other words, it is necessary to reflect on the presence and organisation of real and concrete spaces for participation, that is, capable of affecting the party's overall political agenda. If the permanent electoral campaign is a feature of the context of the 'democracy of the public' in which we find ourselves today, it is not essential to translate this dynamic also within the parties into a similarity whereby the action required of members is limited, more often than not, to activities of voluntary labour on the occasion of the increasingly numerous electoral appointments. In short, it is necessary to reconnect the link between *membership* and participation, which the transformation of parties has in many cases broken. While it is true that there can be no representative democracy without parties to organise it, at the same time parties that are completely empty in terms of *membership* are unstable parties and easily prey to vested concerns to the detriment of the interests of the community. As Crouch wrote in this respect, 'the fundamental mistake is to assume that because most people have lost interest in politics, somehow political power tends to fade away and no one wants or uses it'. (Crouch 2003, 4).

CONCLUSIONS

We have therefore seen how the question of the relationship between representation and liberal democracy is essentially based on the mandate. And how the latter can only

be free, but at the same time must be tempered in some way to allow the maintenance of a certain degree of correspondence of a fiduciary type, as well as possible accountability, between the representative and the represented. It is essentially this dynamic that makes the presence of political parties indispensable in representative democracies. In this respect, the role played by political parties in enabling the representative process embedded in institutions to function properly is clear. At the same time, the consequences of the current situation, in which the political party is at the centre of a crisis of legitimacy and trust that, in many respects, does not seem to be reversible, are clear. In this sense, political parties, particularly those of the social-democratic tradition as well as those of the so-called new-left, seem to be facing a systemic crisis that pushes existing parties to withdraw into institutional structures in cartel dynamics, and new parties to organise themselves, very often resorting to populist rhetoric, in order to occupy the spaces left empty by the other actors. In all these cases it seems that the modes of participation within the parties play an important role in blocking their transformative action. The way in which internal conflict takes place, the written and unwritten rules through which it is organised and substantiated in the real and everyday dimension, are all important elements in terms of the effects produced. Ultimately, this is not so much a question of party model, but rather of the effects of the democratic process within parties in helping to block the transformative possibilities of the party itself to change. If parties are today, in any case and despite everything, fundamental subjects for the quality of democracy (Morlino, 2011), then and as a direct consequence the quality of the internal process of participation, is something to be studied more carefully.

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