

Anders Hellström

Help! The Populists Are Coming
Appeals to the People in
Contemporary Swedish Politics

MIM WORKING PAPER SERIES 13:4



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
MALMÖ INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES
OF MIGRATION, DIVERSITY AND
WELFARE (MIM)

MIM Working Papers Series No 13:4

Published

2013

Editors

Christian Fernández, christian.fernandez@mah.se

Published by

Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM)

Malmö University

205 06 Malmö

Sweden

Online publication

www.bit.mah.se/muep

ANDERS HELLSTRÖM

Help! The Populists Are Coming

Appeals to the People in Contemporary Swedish Politics

Abstract

This article introduces the concept of *banal populism* to emphasize the intrinsic ambiguity of the relationship between democracy and populism in representative politics. The article expands on three approaches to populism, based on *ideology*, *style* and *logic* to suggest a framework for the study of articulations of banal populism in the everyday political communication between the people and the mediated elite, devoid of normative presuppositions. Empirically, the article shows how the rhetorical figure of *the reality people* [*Verklighetens folk*] has been used differently by three political parties in Sweden; i. e the right-wing populist party New Democracy (NyD), in parliament between 1991 and 1994, the Christian Democratic Party (KD) which is currently in the government and also by the nationalist-populist party the Sweden Democrats (SD), which gained 20 seats in the parliament by 2010. The article concludes that the struggle of who the people are and what they wish for is a permanent companion nested in the everyday communication of the votes.

Keywords:

Populism, banal populism, the reality people, the Sweden Democrats, the New Democracy, the Christian Democrats

Bio note:

Anders Hellström is Associate Professor in Political Science. Currently he chairs a comparative research project on the nationalist-populist parties in the Nordic countries at

MIM, funded by the NOS-HS 2013–2015. He has published extensively on issues pertaining to nationalism, populism, European Integration, identity and the media in journals such as *Ethnicities*, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *Government & Opposition*, *Journal of Language and Politics*, *European Societies*, *European Legacy*, *Geografiska Annaler*, *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, *Sociologisk forskning* and *Tidskriftet Politik*.

Contact: anders.hellstrom@mah.se

Introduction

Mainstream European politicians are troubled by the eruption of Populist Radical Right Parties (RRPs) in the parliamentary arena.¹ These parties, in general, suggest strong reductions in the immigration to our country, protecting the interests of our people. The concept of populism is frequently being associated with the RRP, at least in Europe. I argue that the fears of populism risk transmuting into a fear of seriously considering the people in democratic governance. Democracy does not merely constitute a formal system for decision making and preference formulation, it also conveys visions about who, ideally, should be representing whom. It has been argued that there is a close semblance between nationalism and democracy (Dahlstedt and Hertzberg, 2007). I will in this article show that a closer encounter with populism in the political communication of the votes brings forth a deeper understanding of the constitution of the people in democratic governance.

This article constructs a framework for the analysis of populism in the everyday communication of the votes between the mediated elites and the people, devoid of normative presuppositions. With populism I refer to the appeals to the people, morally detached from the elite, in the everyday political communication between the elected representatives and the citizenry. I here introduce the concept of *banal populism* to, firstly, conform to the view that populism is an ‘inescapable ambiguity’ (Canovan, 1999: 16) of democracy and thus not alien to mainstream politics. Secondly, I will show how my framework on banal populism can be used to analyze appeals to *the reality people* in contemporary Swedish politics.

I begin with a discussion on the intrinsic functioning of populism in democratic governance, centered on the people as an object of democratic mobilization. I then expand on three approaches to populism, based on *ideology*, *style* and *logic* to suggest a framework for the study of appeals to the people in democratic practice. Empirically, I will illustrate how the rhetorical figure of *the reality people* [*Verklighetens folk*] has been used by (1) the right-wing populist party New Democracy (NyD), in the national parliament between 1991 and 1994; (2) the Christian Democratic Party (KD) before the 2010 national elections and also by (3) the nationalist-populist party the Sweden Democrats (SD), which for the first time gained seats in the Swedish parliament by 2010.

Populism and Democracy

The ultimate source of authority in democratic governance is centered on the category of the people. In essence, representative politics represents the interests and wishes of the population – to embody and realize the popular will. Talking in the name of the people, usually described as the trademark of populism, is essential for all political parties trying to maximize voting support. It has been argued that populism, previously at the fringe now belongs to the political mainstream (Mudde, 2004: 542). The Populist radical right, according to Mudde (2010: 1167): ‘should be seen as a radical interpretation of mainstream values’; hence a ‘pathological normalcy’.

In the public debate, the populist politician is presented as an opportunist that suggests simple solutions to complex political issues. Populism is a term of abuse, used by its antagonists to present their own politics as genuine and long-term oriented. In this argumentative logic *populist* is something that mainstream politics is not.

Herein is an ambiguity. If representative politics is about representing the people, the distinction between the people and the elite is crucial for pursuing democratic politics. The so-called populists share with the mainstream political culture the conviction that the legitimacy of democratic governance lies in the sovereign people.

Kaltwasser (2011) suggests that different democratic ideals provide different answers to the question whether populism is a democratic corrective to include more people in the polity or rather a pathological phenomenon that attracts e.g. the RRP to exclude ethnic minorities. This article expands on the assumption that the intricate relationship between democracy and populism is open for empirical contestation and ultimately concerns which people is mobilized against whom.

The People in democratic governance

The people is an elusive concept filled with ambiguities. The fear of the people as the uneducated masses suggests that the people needs to be controlled and kept in check by responsible elites, according to Panizza (2005: 15): ‘traces of the original image of the people as dangerous and irrational plebs still resonate in late modern politics...’.

Sometimes the people refers to something narrower than the population, which could imply an exclusive group of privileged citizens but sometimes ‘(conversely and confusingly) because it means precisely those excluded from that elite, “the common people”’ (Canovan 2005: 3). The people connotes to, on the one hand, the masses or the lower strata of the population and on the other hand to the citizenry of the state.

Most importantly, the people is a legitimizing force in representative politics (Näsström 2007: 624). Political representatives who say to talk in the name of the people in order to reclaim power to the people against the ruling elites (e.g. the king, the government), rely on myths about popular authority. The uses of myths about the people are something that we cannot do without and according to Margaret Canovan (2002: 417): ‘this emperor has no clothes, but to keep the system functioning we must go on admiring his imaginary robe’. This is what I refer to as *banal populism*; the mythology of the people is constitutive for the everyday political communication between the representative elites and the people. I will in the next section argue that the manifestations of banal populism bring a flavour of what Michael Oakeshott (1996) refers to as the politics of faith in modern representative politics.

A flavor of the politics of faith

Arditi (2004) recognizes that populism, like any other concept in the political vocabulary, revolves around the poles of the politics of skepticism and the politics of faith – on the promises of human salvation and redemption (the politics of faith), on the one hand, and institutional stability and pragmatism on the other (the politics of skepticism).

This distinction, introduced by Oakeshott (1996: 66–7), should not be equated with a particular ideology, political party or governmental system. Rather these poles represent two distinct logics that in their ideal-form organize the activity of governing in modern politics. In short, the politics of faith refers to the perfection of mankind; its faith in human activity serves the pursuit of human emancipation and the improvement of the human character. The misfortunes of political or religious dissent are, in this vein, treated as “errors” to be corrected and suppressed by minute governance. The politics of skepticism, by contrast, shows no trust in human perfection and the activity of governing is lim-

ited to and given by the law. This logic objects to any imposition of governmental activity to determine human activity.

Margaret Canovan (1999) says that populism follows democracy like a shadow. Populist mobilization, then, constitutes a reaction towards *politics-as-usual* (Arditi 2004: 142). Populism is an important reminder that politics is not merely about administering already made decisions – it is also about shaping and realizing popular expectations and visions. Political equality is not merely a formal quality, but translates itself in practical experiences (Dahlstedt and Hertzberg 2007). Drawing on Oakeshott's distinction, Canovan (2004: 245) elaborates on two faces of democratic politics; redemption and pragmatism. The pragmatic face is about maintaining an institutional design to manage conflicts and disagreements, without anyone involved getting hurt. Conversely, the redemptive face expands on the idea of popular sovereignty and raises claims about bringing the masses into representative politics.

Democracy as an ideal-form of governance constitutes a redemptive vision, to enable the citizenry to realize *the good society*. In its actual implementation, though, democracy features certain institutions and is pragmatically concerned with stability and order. In its particular form, the pragmatic view features e.g. free elections, multi-party system and the rule-of-law.

It is illusory, Canovan predicts, to imagine democratic governance without redemptive impulses. She (1999: 14) makes an allegory to the role of the church in modern secular societies, referring to Max Weber's idea that 'a church is an institution in which religious charisma is routinized' in which the voice of God is mediated and institutionally arranged. The analogy suggests that populism thrives in societies that suffer from a lack of balance between the two faces of democracy – to ignore the redemptive impulses inherent in democratic politics is similar to running a church in which the congregation lacks faith in religion.

According to Chantal Mouffe (2000) the passions of representative politics refer to the delicate balancing between the functional needs of the system and the emotive appeals to the people. The basic paradox of liberal democracy, accordingly, is that it combines the incongruent ideals of the universal (liberal) rights of the individual to be protected from

both state oppression and the fears of mob-rule with the particularistic references to popular sovereignty by means of majority rule. The question how we authorise political power in representative democracies thus bridge the direct demands of the citizenry and the mediated power of the representative elites.

Given that politics is not merely about the aggregation of rational interests or sensible deliberation, but also about mobilizing passions, frustrations and enthusiasm in the name of the people – then, populism plays a significant role in modern representative politics. In this vein, populism connotes to various modes of identification rather than to merely individuals or parties (Panizza 2005). Populism, in this vein, constitutes a particular kind of democratic protest (Abbott 2007).

I suggest that the manifestations of banal populism; hence, the appeals to the people in representative politics, potentially, bring a flavour of *the politics of faith*, complementing a view on politics as the administration of political decision that, in turn, cling closer to *the politics of scepticism*. The appeals to the people thus, potentially, aim to satisfy popular demands of collective identification, rather than the interests and pragmatic concerns of institutional stability.

In the next section, I discuss three contemporary – not easily separable – approaches to the study of populism in the scholarly literature. This overview aims to create an analytical framework for the scrutiny of banal appeals to the people in the political communication between the mediated elites and citizenry.

Populism as ideology

Scholars of populism who attribute to the populist movement a certain ideological core tend to describe populism as *thin ideology* (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008; Abts and Rummens, 2007; Mudde 2004). This interpretation, in turn, relies on Michael Freedens' (1998) understanding of nationalism. For him, ideology represents a coherent frame of interpretations, providing answers to how values of e.g. freedom and equality best be understood, given priority to and further implemented. Nationalism tends to transmute itself to different institutional settings, and blend with other ideologies such as socialism, conservatism or liberalism. It displays a thin core, which according to Freedens, rests on a positive valorization of a particular group; i.e. the nationals.

With reference to Freedman, Ben Stanley (2008) suggests that populism is a thin ideology, used by political agents to mobilize ‘the people’. The ideology of populism is devoid of coherent ideological traditions. The conceptual core of populism refers to the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. It rests on the positive valorization of the people and thus the denigration of the elite (ibid: 102). In this view, populism – once it has found its host vessel (an adjacent ideology) – might turn into the core element of e.g. a nationalist ideological configuration (See e.g. Mudde 2007).

Paul Taggart (2002: 67) claims that the appeals to the people are not enough to serve as the constitutive element of populist discourse, though: ‘the people’ is too broad and diffuse a concept to have real meaning as it signifies different things to different populists /.../ Thus, ‘the people’ are nothing more than the populace of the heartland’. Populist movements are chameleonic, Taggart predicts (2004), and only seem to mobilize when *the heartland* is threatened by e.g. “mass-immigration” or EU-membership, which explains its relative short-liveness – once in power, it gets increasingly difficult to maintain the populist position.

This view on populism has triggered scholars to warn about the populist ideological challenge to liberal democratic societies. In particular, scholars have referred to populism as thin ideology to assess the ideological underpinnings of a particular European party family that resist (too much) immigration, instead supporting the interests and wishes of the native population. In his much referred to definition of the RRP, then, Cas Mudde (2007: 22–3) include three definitional features: nativism, authoritarianism and populism as thin centered ideology, based on the antagonistic separation between ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’.

Discussing the populism of *the radical right*, Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson (2004) say that the RRP parties’ political agenda is more than mere opportunism; it aims to replace democracy with *ethnocracy* – an ethnic characterization of the “true people” that embody the *volonté general*.

In this view, the popular will is predetermined and restricted to the national population. This is an exclusionary appealing to national preferences, likewise openly discriminatory and based on the illusive trajectory of the common sense. Betz and Johnson, bor-

rowing a concept from Pierre-André Taguieff, assumes its ideological core to be rooted in *differentialist racism* imbued with categorical imperatives that preserves the identity of the native group to secure the survival of the nation.

Betz and Johnson are certainly right to warn about the progress and the dissemination of ideas attributed to e.g. the *Lega Nord* in Italy or the *Front National* in France. Banal appeals to the people do not, however, merely convey particular concerns devoted to a certain *ethnos*, based on the dichotomy between the natives and the nonnatives (Mény and Surel 2002; Canovan 2005: 75). In modern political history, populism has been associated with a diverse set of movements and parties, ranging from e.g. the U.S people Party and the *Narodniki* movement in Russia to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, to mentioning only a few examples (Canovan 2004: 243).

Populism as thin ideology shares certain core features such as the existence of two homogenous antagonistically opposed groups in the society, the elite versus the people (which is positively valued by the populists) and the idea of popular sovereignty (Stanley 2008: 102). In the populist ideology, the people and the elite are viewed as antithetical opposites (ibid) and diffuse through full ideologies.

Populism as style

Populism as *style* refers to a certain way of doing politics. It is generally acknowledged, that the populist style matches well with a medialized political landscape as the political form proves to be more significant for the political outcome, than its content. The populist style typically relies on *the charismatic leadership* to partly bypass established ways of doing politics via e.g. party politics. Populist politics encourages direct channels for popular participation. The charismatic leader embodies the popular will in his or her *persona*. In this regard, the populist politician mobilizes voters along feelings of resentment, aiming to represent the *common sense of the ordinary people vis-à-vis* the political institutions and the established (indirect) ways of doing politics.

The populist leader is both one of the people and their leader. In this operation, she/he 'appears as an ordinary person with extraordinary attributes' (Panizza 2005: 21). Populism as style here associates with psycho-analytical ideas of the idealization of the object of identification; hence, the love of the leader has been 'put in place of the ego ide-

al' (Laclau 2005: 55). The equivalential attachment forged between people appears as the result of their common love of the populist leader.

In European politics, the populist *style* has been attributed to dissimilar political figures such as Vladimir Putin in Russia and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. Populism as *style* refers to the personalization of politics, an emphasis on charismatic leadership and the medialization of mainstream politics.

Populism as *style* shows preferences for a close relationship between the electorate and the elected. Traditionally, the link between the voters and the government has been organized and mediated by the parties, Peter Mair (2002: 84) says. According to him, the parties no longer adequately represent competing interests to 'guarantee procedures rather than mediation' (ibid: 91). As the parties cease to play a central role in organizing electoral preferences, democracy is mediated by populist means. The British case shows: "populism as a form of governing ... where the people are undifferentiated, and in which a more or less neutral government attempts to serve the interests of all." (ibid: 96).

The distinction between ideology and style corresponds to the analytical separation between politics as content (populism as *ideology*) and politics as form (populism as *style*). It is not rare that these features of politics intermingle – and certainly so in the extensive literature on the RRP. I here refer to the charismatic leadership as a particular form of doing politics, though. In the literature populist parties tend to be associated with particular organizational characteristics centered on the leader rather than on traditional party organizations.

Populism as logic

Populism, as *logic*, creates a new form of agency out of a plurality of political demands. It lacks universally applicable content, yet it requires a radical division of the society in two separate camps, the people versus the elite. Ernesto Laclau (2005: 117) shares such a view on populism. He refutes attempts to finding out what is idiosyncratic in populist movements, as these – according to him – are essentially flawed. Instead, populism (as *logic*) constitutes a certain discursive activity through which the people is defined and mobilized. Populist mobilization, given this interpretation, provides otherwise disregarded groups with tools to voice their fragmented demands and organize these through a *chain*

of equivalence. This view is in line with a radical democratic approach that recognizes social antagonisms as necessary for democratic politics (Kaltwasser 2011: 191).

The constant political dispute over the proper name of the people – and thus the claims for popular sovereignty – crystallize in various political projects (e.g. the Kemalist movement in Turkey and the Péronist movement in Argentina, two examples given by Laclau) that try to monopolize the meaning of the people to match particular political programs. There is no guarantee that the populist logic may be used by e.g. progressive political movements to mobilize solidarity ties against authoritarian governance. Similarly, it is not preset that the populist logic may be used by e.g. demagogues to exploit the masses against the visible minorities. Populism as logic implies a particular strategy to include new social groups in the democratic process, yet to exclude others.

Laclau's move from ideology to discourse shifts attention to a closer scrutiny of how a variety of political movements refer to 'the people', Stavrakakis says (2004: 255). Assessing the populist *logic* in contemporary representative politics invites a close encounter with how the appeals to the people are invoked to recommend political action. However, Stanley (2008: 98) would argue against this view as there is no guarantee that the assorted differences between the fragmented demands would articulate themselves in a solidaristic way.

I would say that the difference between Stanley's conceptualization of populism as thin ideology and Laclau's view of populism as formal logic should not be exaggerated. Their different approaches partly emanate from different empirical focus (while Laclau tends to focus on populist mobilization in Latin America, Stanley's empirical illustrations tends towards the European experiences). Kaltwasser (2011: 199) thus argues that '...in the European context, populism and the radical right are experiencing since the 1980s a sort of "marriage of convenience"'. Kaltwasser suggests that the study of populism should be based on concrete cases that show populism to be either a corrective or a threat to democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012).

Banal Populism

A populist movement might rely on a certain ideological populist position, against the elites, embrace a particular populist style to attract voters or pursue the populist logic between the people and the elite to gain credibility for a particular political programme. One possible route forward is to separate between populist ideologies that, on the hand, are vitalizing representative democracy and, on the other hand, risk undermining the liberal democratic institutions. Another possibility is to discern to what extent the populist style makes a permanent or occasional feature of modern representative politics; do we live under what Mudde (2004) refers to as a populist zeitgeist? To view populism as *logic*, invites the scrutiny of the appeals to the people as political means to bring together fragmented demands into a cohesive whole.

The concept of banal populism invites further scrutiny of how the differentiation between the people and the elite is being invoked in the everyday political communication between the citizenry and the mediated elite. By way of analogy, Michael Billig's (1995) much referred to notion of *banal nationalism* suggests that nationalism can be banal, non-violent and possess a reassuring normality. By means of banal nationalism we, the citizens, are constantly reminded of our membership of the nation and our loyalty to it. *Banal populism*, to conclude the analogy, is based on a moral division between the people and the elite, appealing to the people in the everyday political competition of the votes.

The notion of banal populism was used by Ekkehard Kopp (1984) in an article that criticized a new bill in higher education by the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom that treated faculty members 'as exchangeable commodities and students as malleable products' (ibid: 70). Recently, Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011: 1272) addresses 'the methodological issue of how populism could be measured?'. They suggest that populism can be measured across time and space by both classic content analysis and a computerized content analysis.

Here I am not primarily interested in measuring different degrees of populism, rather I focus on the manifestation of banal populism in the political communication between the people and the mediated elites. Focusing on particular appeals to the people

provides a means to analyze articulations of populism in democratic action, devoid of normative presuppositions.

Manifestations of banal populism, I assume, illustrates the conceptual ambiguity nested in liberal democracies. The liberal pillar is about the anonymous rule of law that protects the individual rights of all citizens against the arbitrary exercises of power. The democratic pillar, in contrast, assumes the political legitimacy to reside not in the law, but with the people. In this framework, populism gives voice to the impulse that too much focus on the array of checks and balances (i.e. the liberal pillar) dilute the democratic promises of popular sovereignty.

Abts and Rummens (2007) argue against this view, what they refer to as the two-strand model of democracy. Rather than stressing the irreconcilability of the democratic and the liberal pillar, they emphasize the mutual dependence of individual rights and the democratic construction of the wills of the people (ibid: 410; cf. Canovan, 2005: 83–90). They suggest a model of three logics. First, the democratic logic assumes that the locus of power in any democratic regime ought to remain an empty place, here following Lefort's seminal works. Second, in the logic of liberalism, the locus of power vanishes and is replaced by the anonymous rule of law. Third, the logic of populism is defined as the closure of the empty place of power by a substantive image of the people. In this vein, 'populism appears as a proto-totalitarian logic', highly incompatible with the compromising forces provided by the democratic and liberal pillars (Abts and Rummens 2007: 414). Accordingly, the populist logic of homogeneity is at odds with the openness of democracy.

They (ibid: 420) conclude: '... when parties argue for their proposals by referring to the 'will of the people', a further analysis of their actions is required to establish whether they envisage a homogenizing and closed interpretation of this will, or whether their proposals are meant as a contribution to the mediated construction of the common good'. This interpretation risks, as I see it, to reduce the understanding of contemporary political activities as either "good" (democratic) or "bad" (populist). Their approach fails to acknowledge that populist mobilization might both serve the pursuit of human emancipation and to block the influences of underprivileged minorities in the democratic polity.

Without political mobilization that involves distinct appeals to the people, democracy risks turning into an activity of governance restricted to the elites. Banal populism emphasises the everyday realities of the populist potential in representative politics; it thrives on popular sovereignty and is at such not *a priori* dangerous for or at odds with democratic politics.

Banal populism in democratic practice

The people needs to be called upon and constructed, in order to elevate from the status of “ordinary people” to become a sovereign authority. It can also be understood as something more trivial, to talk in the name of the people, as many politicians often do, is to use the people to confer legitimacy upon certain political views.

Canovan (1999) distinguishes between three different ways of referring to the people in political discourse. First, it could refer to *the united people* as a contrast to the political elites that are accused of dividing the people. This appeal envisions the people as a united body in need of cautious care. Second, the appeal to the people would address the view that politics ultimately should be restricted to *our people*, e.g. the population of *the heartland*. This appeal is distinguishably exclusive, as it demarcates which groups of people — or ideas — that belong to the people. Third, Canovan talks about the appeals to *the common people* against the educated and privileged cultural elites. This appeal regularly presupposes that the interests and views of the ordinary people are overridden by the political elites and ridiculed by the cultural elites.

In the empirical section of this paper, I will analyse uses of *the reality people* [*Verklighetens folk*] in the Swedish political discourse. These references are in line with references to the common people. The prefix “reality” indicates a moral distinction between the people on the ground and the supposedly airy-fairy elites (political and/or cultural) not acquainted with how people regularly live their lives. These references in the political language, potentially, bring a flavour of the politics of faith as a reaction to the pragmatic-oriented elite/s.

The reality people has been used by three Swedish parties, two different RRP's and one mainstream party.² I will analyse the content, form and logic of this usage following

the three approaches to populism. The three different approaches to populism, as outlined above, invite different questions that will be used in the subsequent analysis.

Table 1 – analytical approaches to the appeals to the reality people in Swedish political discourse.

Approach	Questions
Ideology	What are the sender's ideological affiliations? What is the ideological content of this appeal?
Style	What are the forms of doing politics provided by the sender? What is the relation between the people and the (charismatic) leader provided by these appeals?
Logic	How and if are these appeals used to mobilize the fragmented demands into a cohesive whole? What political action to take place is recommended by the sender?

The Reality People: the New Democracy (NyD)

In February 1991 the entrepreneur and count, Ian Wachtmeister, together with the record-company director Bert Karlsson, formed a new political party (NyD). The party made a rocket career and crossed the electoral threshold to the national parliament in September 1991 with 6.7 percent of the total votes. The party promised to bring more fun into politics and their profile (neo-liberal and anti-establishment) was much in line with the progress parties in Norway and Denmark in the 1970s. The NyD mobilized voters along an anti-establishment rhetoric, often neo-liberal oriented, against too high taxes, public expenses, bureaucracy and also immigration.

The NyD was run like a business franchise (Art, 2011: 178). Internal fractions within the party (between e.g. Karlsson and Wachtmeister) and the lack of local party organization soon led to the collapse of the party – in the 1994 parliamentary elections it lost its representation in the national parliament (Rydgren, 2006). Consequently, the NyD has been referred to as a Flash-Party in the literature (Art, 2011: 56).

According to the sociologist Jens Rydgren (2006: 31–2) the NyD benefitted from a general shift in public opinion towards the right in socioeconomic terms and also on a growing concern for sociocultural affairs; hence, the emergence of an anti-immigration niche in the electoral field. A prevalent theme in the NyD rhetoric was the rhetorical figure of *the reality people*, interpreted as ordinary workers tired of too much bureaucracy

and too high welfare expenses. The uses of this particular rhetorical figure correspond to the emergence of a protest dimension in Swedish politics and a growing dissatisfaction with the established parties (ibid: 32). The Swedish voters became increasingly volatile, which opened up opportunities for new parties to politicize new issues (ibid: 34).

The reality people alluded to the ordinary people that constitute a rather fragmented assembly of people who were united in feelings of resentment towards the elite (Wendel, 2001). The reality people resisted both the foreigners — who were accused of polluting the Swedish society with criminality (a theme developed with time) — and the elites that neglected to recognize the popular demands of “the common man”. This corresponds to an antiestablishment strategy used by the NyD to speak on behalf of the common people against both the mainstream parties and the mainstream press (Rydgren, 2006: 45).

Ideology

The appeals to the reality people in the NyD rhetoric assume a division between the corrupted elite, and the morally superior people who is akin to resist such interventions by the state. The strong anti-immigration stance developed by the NyD over time pitted the reality people not only against the political elites, but also against those people (i. e the immigrants) who were accused of exploiting welfare benefits; hence, a combination of neo-liberal economic policies and a welfare-chauvinist position.

The party failed to establish internally agreed coherent views about which people should be mobilized against which elites; hence, content-wise this appeal proved to be empty-hearted.

Style

The appeals to the reality people can be interpreted as a form of communication strategy that relies on the charismatic leadership of Karlsson and Wachtmeister, who were not recognized as normal politicians. The two party leaders incarnate the personalization of politics and their appearance provoked much media attention. They represented segments of the society outside the realm of party politics to generate support for a political agenda that ultimately thrived on the gap between *the reality people* and the elected political elite/s. The lack of traditional party organization and the failure to reach internal agree-

ment on fundamental issues (e.g. Wachtmeister and Karlsson expressed different views as to whether under which conditions the NyD should support the governing center-right bloc) made the party much dependent on their leaders who, eventually, failed to hold the party together (Rydgren, 2006: chapter 4).

Logic

The essence of the appeals to the reality people, finally, downplayed the role of elected representatives to interfere (too much) with how the people choose to live their life. The party managed to mobilize previously unheard popular demands of e.g. less bureaucracy and also less immigration, to lend itself a potent contender in the political communication of the votes. Ultimately, the NyD failed to transform the fragmented popular visions into a potent new political agency, other than as mere resistance to the establishment.

The Reality People: The Christian Democrats (KD)

Göran Hägglund is the current leader of the Christian Democratic Party in Sweden. He is currently minister of social affairs in both the first (2006–2010) and the second (2010–) governmental Centre-Right coalition. On 17 September 2009, Hägglund (2009) published a debating article in the leading Swedish morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*. He predicted that the “radical elite” had become the new upper-class. Accordingly, its academic language and far-fetched reasoning around e.g. queer theory might appeal to small-numbered, likewise loud-voiced, cultural elite, however it is polemically oriented towards how the ordinary people (i.e. the reality people) live their lives.

In an analysis of the ideological development of the Swedish Christian Democrats, Douglas Brommesson (2010) suggests that the use of the *reality people* mirrors a possible ideological re-orientation of the party, a step further away from dogmatic confession-ism. The Christian Democrats, following Brommesson (ibid), are by now proponents of negative freedom; e.g. to acknowledge the right of families to realize the good life without much state intervention. Brommesson argues that the ideological orientation also signals a shift towards particularism; hence, an emphasis on the everyday life of ordinary Swedish citizens and on the local bounded community against the rootlessness and ideals of individual self-realization associated with the “radical elites”.

With *the reality people*, Hägglund refers to the regular families that try to make the daily life go around. The appeals to *the reality people* were not used against the Swedish foreign-born population, however oriented towards the cultural elite who supposedly intervene too much in how ordinary families choose to live their life.

Ideology

The appeals to *the reality people* in the KD political rhetoric indicate an ideological positioning that take side with the ordinary citizens – i.e. the working population, families with small children and so forth – against the radical (cultural) elite who, undeservedly, look down on how *the reality people* live their everyday lives. These appeals do not alone constitute a full-fledged ideology; however, combined with adjacent ideological articulations towards e.g. social conservatism these appeals are made constitutive aspects of a more thick ideology that acknowledges the values of negative freedom and community cohesion against urban centered life-style politics and excessive individualization. The Swedish Christian Democratic Party does not refer to the Christian heritage *per se* but to the communitarian values that are held and reproduced by the ordinary Swedish families today.

Style

The forms of doing politics are founded on a traditional party organization. The KD is the smallest party in the current Swedish governmental coalition. In this sense, the appeals to the reality people might be interpreted as a particular communication strategy to obtain a wider potential voter share. It is seemingly not based on ideas of the charismatic leadership; it rather accentuates and appreciates the “normal” life style of the common man.

Logic

The KD appeals to the reality people, potentially, embrace a diverse set of people who unite in their unanimous resistance towards the cultural elite. These appeals take side with the people on the ground that choose to live their life the way they always had, not having to be interrupted by the seemingly progressive ideas of the radical elite.

The appeals to the reality people did not serve the ideals of human emancipation, but to appreciating the normal life style, differentiated from the experiments of cultural relativism injected by the radical elite.

The Reality People: The Sweden Democrats (SD)

Jimmie Åkesson is the Party Leader of the nationalist³ party SD that in the 2010 national elections crossed the electoral threshold to the national parliament. When Hägglund picked up the rhetorical figure of *the reality people*, Åkesson replied that it is the SD, rather than the minister for social affairs, that represent the interests of *the reality people*. In a debating article in the tabloid *Expressen*, he argued that *the reality people* is challenged by ideals of political correctness that disregard what the people really think (Åkesson, 2009). The SD, according to Åkesson, listens to and takes into account the real problems with e.g. “mass-immigration” and the “alarming criminality rates”, which *the reality people* experience in their daily life. The SD appreciates the authentic Swedish cultural heritage that appeals to *the reality people*, yet ridiculed by the cultural elite: ‘For the cultural radical elite, that obviously include high representatives of the KD, the Swedish cultural heritage is boring, racist and hillbilly-like’.⁴

The uses of this particular metaphor suggest that the party is a normal party for normal citizens and thus signals a step further away from the party’s rather shady legacy in the extreme right movement (Rydgren, 2006; Hellström and Nilsson, 2010). Åkesson says to represent the common man who experience problems with e.g. multi-cultural experiments and the “mass-importation” of culturally dissimilar immigrants (See e.g. Åkesson, 2007). He welcomes Hägglund’s appeals to *the reality people*. He insists to be a much more credible spokesman for *the reality people*, though.

Ideology

In the SD political rhetoric, populism as thin ideology indicates a conflation between *demos* and *ethnos*. *The reality people* are culturally similar Swedes, and, potentially, also immigrants who have assimilated well into the Swedish culture. The elite are represented by the other parliamentary parties, the mainstream press and the cultural elites that dominate the public debate. Ideologically, the party combines ethno-pluralist xenophobia with anti-elitist populism (Rydgren, 2006: 109).

The appeals to *the reality people* are combined with elements of an explicit nationalist positioning. This position entails that the natives come first and cultural differences are viewed as eternal and incommensurable in line with the ethno-pluralist ideological doctrine. At the SD party congress in November 2011, the SD defined its ideology as rooted in social conservatism and not merely nationalism. This shift, arguably, allows the SD to discursively broaden its political agenda to expand the range of possible political issues (Hellström et. al, 2012). It is in line with such re-orientation that we should understand the party's references to *the reality people*.

Style

The appeals to *the reality people* in the SD political rhetoric emphasize a particular style based on the party's underdog position in Swedish politics (Hellström et. al, 2012). It dwells on popular concerns about mundane fears in the everyday life of ordinary citizens in local communities.

The SD appeals to *the reality people* do not embark on ideas of the charismatic leadership – rather these appeals aim to reflect the mundane realities of the majority population. Following Norocel's (2012) analysis of the family metaphor on the internal SD-arena the party leader incarnates the image of the common man; hence, 'the conservative son' (ibid). The appeals to *the reality people* in the SD political rhetoric suggest that the people on the ground prefer safety and security instead of a generous immigration policy and multi-culturalism. The SD claims to represent the voice of the people *vis-à-vis* the political and cultural elites. The appeals to *the reality people* thus aim to narrow the gap between the people and the mediated elites.

Logic

The appeals to *the reality people* shape popular expectations and fears embedded in the everyday experiences of the ordinary citizens. These appeals epitomize a longing back to attitudes and interests that counter the ideals of e.g. individual self-realization. To proceed with this task the party mobilizes voters, from both the right and the left, along a message that radicalize banal sentiments of what constitutes the Swedish national identity. In the SD perspective, the ideal of social cohesion necessitates cultural conformism and this refutes the multi-cultural experiments of the political and cultural elites.

The Reality People: the struggles of meaning

The KD has ensured property rights over the trademark *the reality people*. On its' homepage the party explains what this concept refers to: 'They who believe it is alright to have a family, to work, to go on vacation, to comfy together with the family on Friday evening and enjoy watching *Så ska det låta*⁵ on the television and do not want politicians to interfere with how they choose to live their everyday lives' (Orrenius, 2009).

The NyD, the KD and the SD all use *the reality people* in different ways, serving different purposes. Arguably, the NyD referred to *the reality people* so as to sustain its anti-establishment position in Swedish politics whereas the KD used the same rhetorical figure to justify a wider ideological transformation, from universal principles based on Christianity to the particular realities of the common man. The SD, finally, uses the same rhetorical figure to gain credibility and public acceptance for its ambition to move from the extreme to the mainstream in Swedish politics. Certainly, further research is needed to test the validity of these tentative conclusions. What unites these banal uses is the emphasis on *the reality people* as both the common people (as opposed to the cultural/radical elite) and the ordinary citizens. Less surprisingly, critical voices in the public debate rebut both these aspirations and e.g. ask: who does not belong to *the reality people*? (see e.g. Baas, 2009).

The various uses of the term indicate its attractive force to raise claims about accurately representing the man on the street, to be on equal footing with *the common man*. This is a struggle of what the people is and wishes for. My analysis, ultimately, shows that the appeals to *the reality people* bring a flavour of the redemptive face of democracy (i.e.

the politics of faith) in contemporary Swedish politics, not limited to ideas of charismatic leadership or the personalization of politics, conversely it is based on ideas of the moral superiority of *the common man*, offering promises that the Swedish society will and/or should remain the same. The appeals to *the reality people*, as it seems, tend to nurture a vision that look backwards rather than forward.

Final Reflections

Should the conclusion of this article be that Göran Hägglund is a populist politician, contaminated by the *populist malaise*? I suggest this kind of question dodge the close semblance between populism and democracy. It is perhaps, then, more relevant to ask the question: how do political actors invoke the populist divide between the people and the elite in the political competition over the votes? This move invites research that focuses less on who is a populist (and who is not), to emphasize the people as the prime object of democratic politics.

The risk is otherwise to conflating our fears of populism with a fear of the people in democratic politics, here represented by the small minority (5, 7 per cent in the 2010 national elections) in Sweden who voted for the SD in the latest national elections. The debate around the SD, on both sides, connotes to the redemptive side of democratic politics. The appeals to *the reality people* rest on and capitalize popular sentiments of what the ideal (Swedish) citizen is and wishes for. This triggers both strong affections and antipathies (Hellström et. al, 2012).

The political struggle of who the people are and what they wish for makes a permanent companion nested in the everyday political communication of the votes. For future research, then, it is worth noting that the articulations of banal populism involve a powerful mobilization force in democratic politics. As such it should neither be reduced to nativist anti-immigrant forces nor to progressive movements that e. g resist authoritative governance.

References

- Abbott, P. 2007. "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan": Democratic Theory, Populism, and Philip Roth's "American Trilogy", *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37: 431–52.
- Abts, K. and Rummens, S. 2007. "Populism versus Democracy", *Political Studies* 55, 405–24.
- Arditi, B. 2004. 'Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan', *Political Studies* 52: 135–43.
- Art, D. (2011) *Inside the Radical Right: The Development of Anti-Immigration Parties in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baas, D. (2009) 'Twitter-bråket: Schyman och Hägglund i hätsk debatt – via microbloggen', *Expressen*, 20 October.
- Betz, H-G and Johnson, C. (2004) 'Against the current—stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9: 311–27.
- Billig, M. (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Brommesson, D. (2010) 'Svenska kristdemokrater i förändring: Från konfessionellt universella till sekulärt partikulära', *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 112: 165–75.
- Canovan, M. (1999) 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies* 47: 2–16.
- Canovan, M. (2002) 'Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy', in Y. Mény (ed.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, pp. 24–44. Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Canovan, M. (2004) 'Populism for political theorists?', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9: 241–52.
- Canovan, M. (2005) *The People*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Dahlstedt, M. and Hertzberg, F. (2007) 'Democracy the Swedish Way? The Exclusion of 'Immigrants' in Swedish Politics', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30: 175–203.
- Freedon, M. (1998) 'Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?', *Political Studies* 46: 748–65.
- Hellström, A., Nilsson, T., and Stoltz, P. (2012) 'Nationalism vs. Nationalism: The Challenge of the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish Public Debate', *Government and Opposition* 47: 186–205.
- Hellström, A. and Nilsson, T. (2010): "'We are the Good Guys": ideological positioning of the nationalist party Sverigedemokraterna in contemporary Swedish politics', *Ethnicities* 10: 55–76.
- Hägglund, G. (2009) 'Sveriges radikala elit har blivit den nya överheten', *Dagens Nyheter* 17 september.
- Kaltwasser, C. (2011) 'The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy', *Democratization* 19: 184–208.
- Kopp, E. (1988) 'Higher Education (Not Yet Post-Thatcher) in the United Kingdom', *Academe* 75: 67–70.
- Laclau, E. (2005) *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Mair, P. (2002) 'Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy', in Y. Mény (ed) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, pp. 81–98. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Mény, Y. and Surel, Y. (2002) 'The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism', in Y. Mény (ed) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, pp. 1–21. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Mouffe, C. (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. London: Verso.
- Mudde, C. (2004) 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39: 542–63.
- Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C. (2010) 'The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy', *West European Politics* 33: 1167–86.

- Mudde, C. and Kaltwasser, C. (eds.) (2012) *Populism in Europe and the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norocel, C. (2012) 'When the Future already Happened: The Common Swede Reclaiming the *Folkhem* (2005–2010)', paper presented at the NOPO network meeting, Bergen.
- Näsström, S. (2007) 'The Legitimacy of the People', *Political Theory* 35: 624–658.
- Oakeshott, M. (1996) *The Politics of Faith & The Politics of Scepticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Orrenius, N. (2009) 'Ian, Göran och Jimmie vill vara verklighetens folk', *Sydsvenskan* 16 October.
- Panizza, F. (2005) 'Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy', in F Panizza (ed) *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, pp. 1 – 31. London: Verso.
- Pijpers, R. (2006) 'Help! The Poles are coming': Narrating a contemporary moral panic', *Geografiska Annaler: Series B* 88: 91–103.
- Rooduijn, M. and Pauwels, T. (2011) 'Measuring Populism: Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis', *West European Politics* 34: 1272–83.
- Rydgren, J. (2006) *From Tax Populism to ethnic nationalism: Radical Right-Wing Populism in Sweden*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Stanley, B. (2008) 'The thin ideology of populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13: 95–110.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (2004) 'Antinomies of formalism: Laclau's theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9: 253–67.
- Taggart, P. (2002) 'Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics', in Y. Mény (ed) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, pp. 62 – 80. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Taggart, P (2004) 'Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9: 269–88.
- Wendel, P. (2001) 'No Title', *Expressen* 29 April.

Åkesson, J. (2007) 'Tal på valkonferensen', *Åkesson om*, blog post 27 March 2010, Retrieved 15 December 2011 (http://sdkuriren.se/blog/index/php/akesson/2010/03/29/tal_pa_valkonferensen).

Åkesson, J. (2009) 'Bra att Hägglund sågar kultureliten', *Expressen* 16 October.

Acknowledgments

Previous versions were presented at the ECPR joint sessions in S:t Gallen, Switzerland (April 2011), the annual meeting of the Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology in Stockholm (May 2011), the International Political Science Association in Rome (September 2012) and at the network conference on Nordic Populism in Bergen (September 2012). The author acknowledges all feedback provided by the participants. An extended thanks goes to Christian Fernández, Emil Persson, Michael Freeden, Cristian Norocel and Jens Rydgren who gave me relevant feedback at various stages in the writing process.

Notes

¹ The paper's title draws on Roos Pijper's article on the moral panic in the original fifteen member states of the European Union before the fulfillment of the Eastern Enlargement in 2004. The member states, following Pijpers, were afraid of being swamped by e.g. low-skilled labour with negative impacts on the domestic labour markets.

² The media material has been collected by means of search, using the search word 'Verklighetens folk' in the print media data base, *Mediarkivet*. In total, I collected more than 2000 articles and news items. The analysis focuses on articles that explicitly dealt with the uses of 'verklighetens folk', by Wachtmeister (29 articles), Göran Hägglund and Jimmie Åkesson (their debate articles and the immediate reactions to these, approximately 50 articles each).

³ The label "nationalism" is according to the party's self-presentation (see further Hellström et. al, 2012).

⁴ Own translation.

⁵ Own translation. *Så ska det låta* is a television game show with celebrities trying to identify and sing the correct songs with the correct lyrics.