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"The crisis and the Challenges  
of Democracy"

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Alfredo Ramos

Priscila Delgado de Carvalho

Leonardo Avritzer

Giovanni Allegretti

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**[www.ces.uc.pt](http://www.ces.uc.pt)**

Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Apartado 3087

3000-995 Coimbra - Portugal

E-mail: [cescontexto@ces.uc.pt](mailto:cescontexto@ces.uc.pt)

Tel: +351 239 855573 Fax: +351 239 855589

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### **Oradores/as**

André Freire, ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra

Fernando Pindado, Institute of Government and Public Policy, IGOP-Barcelona

Gonçalo Canto Moniz, Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra

José Manuel Ribeiro, Presidente da Câmara de Valongo e Presidente da Rede Portuguesa de Autarquias Participativas

Maria Paula Meneses, Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra

Marisa von Bülow, Universidade de Brasília

Stefania Barca, Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra e Universidade de Lund

Teresa Cravo, Centro de Estudos Sociais e Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra

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## Introduction: The Crisis and the Challenges of Democracy

**Alfredo Ramos,<sup>1</sup>** INCT-IDCC – Institute of Democracy

**Priscila D. Carvalho,<sup>2</sup>** INCT-IDCC – Institute of Democracy

**Giovanni Allegretti,<sup>3</sup>** Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

**Leonardo Avritzer,<sup>4</sup>** Federal University of Minas Gerais and INCT-IDCC –  
Institute of Democracy

This new issue of Cescontexto-Debates discusses the current crisis of democracy and how it intersects with the long-lasting challenges of contemporary democracies. Democracy is still a highly contested phenomenon, and those who thought that liberal democracy had prevailed overall are being proved mistaken. Nowadays, we can observe elements of a crisis both in the older democracies and in younger regimes, of the third and fourth waves of democratization. Assessing the current crisis requires understanding regional traits and what is old and what is new when compared to the previous crisis. It also requires discussing how this crisis affects core democratic features such as representation and participation, along with pressing issues such as inequality, communication technologies, and the planetary climate crisis. Moreover, it is worth wondering if forms of civic participation can respond to the challenges posed by the current crisis of democracy. This question is connected to the genesis of the workshop “The Crisis and the Challenges of Democracy”, held in CES-Coimbra at the beginning of November 2019. The workshop was organized by the Ph.D. program “Democracy in the Twenty-First Century” and by the Brazilian INCT - Institute of Democracy. As the doctoral course puts a strong emphasis on participatory and democratic innovations, it offers a good standpoint for discussing the connections between citizens’ participation and the crisis of democracy. Additionally, the workshop has been conceived as part of a gradual readjustment of this Ph.D. program’s focus, by including, within its concerns, new standpoints on the democratic crisis, as well as the rise of theories related to the expansion of technopolitics, and new critical perspectives on theoretical models that are excessively tied to an Anthropocene-centric vision.

Each paper of the issue engages in the abovementioned concerns from different theoretical, empirical, and methodological standpoints. These papers were selected among 21 presentations at 5 workshop sessions. All papers were discussed by keynote speakers and contributed to set up a rich approach about the multiple layers of the current democratic crisis. Selected authors submitted a second revised draft, which later received a blind peer-review. The papers included in this volume are, thus, the result of a double process of peer-reviewing.

1 Associate researcher at the INCT-IDCC – Institute of Democracy.

2 Post-doctoral researcher at the INCT-IDCC - Institute of Democracy.

3 Senior researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the Coimbra University, Portugal. Coordinator of "PEOPLES' Observatory: Participation, Innovation and Local Powers".

4 Full professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Coordinator of the INCT-IDCC – Institute of Democracy.

## Assessing the features of the current democratic crisis: an overview of the workshop

Critical democratic theory from a participatory standpoint and the potential ways for deepening democracy are both key concerns of those involved in the workshop. There is an ongoing dispute between two types of democracy. On the one hand, there are low-intensity democracies, which do not guarantee conditions of political equality, reduce participation to the electoral vote, and tend to only recognize individual identities, while denying the importance of collective ones. This is typical of the hegemonic canon of democracy, which reduces the capacities of citizens to elect their leaders and perpetuates a tense relation between mobilization and institutionalization. On the other hand, there are high-intensity democracies, which seek to reverse this framework. The construction of public spaces that, based on an increased role for participation and deliberation, incorporate citizens into the elaboration of public policies and the control of governments, is one of the fundamental characteristics of this second type of democracy (Avritzer and Santos, 2002).

Under this framework, the workshop participants drew a vivid narrative of the current democratic crisis and the urgent research agenda it fosters. This crisis connects institutional and economic features. Classic representative institutions have been facing problems of legitimacy for a while now, but these problems multiply as democratic institutions no longer offer a counterweight to neoliberal economy - especially in its global financialized form. In some world regions, welfare systems (often incomplete ones) are threatened by the disembedding of economy and politics, while, in others, the commodification of life seems to have no limits, reaching land, water and the environment in a newly disruptive level.

In this scenario, populism has emerged as a widespread phenomenon, whose different facets - as an ideology or as a political language - defy and seduce scholars, activists, and citizens alike. The strength of populism may indicate that we are facing not only a crisis of democracy, but a crisis of the established political forms of representation and participation. In fact, there are other sources of instability of these political forms, which include technological developments related to the Internet.

Political practices are being reshaped within the Internet and, more recently, in the specific domain represented by social media. Scholars are still understanding its impacts over the production, mediation, and diffusion of information, as well as on political gatekeeping. One thing is for sure: all of them are producing effects on the functioning of real-existing democracies and changing the composition of the public sphere in ways that potentially impact the regime.

The environmental and the democratic crises are simultaneous, and they intersect in multiple points. One of these points relates to the narrative battles about the various senses the environmental crisis has, and how such disputes are shaped by the political strength of different social and economic groups (given the disparate possibilities these groups have of voicing their concerns). Another one relates to the open-ended outcomes of the ecological crisis in relation to democracy, as the environmental crisis may lead either to more democratic practices - in the sense that they will be bounded by collectively-agreed rules and procedures and inclusive policies - or to undemocratic ones.

Finally, historical and geographical settings matter, for the global crisis has different regional features and effects. Europe struggles with the impacts of the unbalanced construction of the European Union; Latin American states, on the other hand, need to cope with inequalities and slow democratization processes and, along with African countries, struggle with the unease

in translating democratic Euro-American institutions into pre-existing, diverse political systems.

In a more critical token, the democratic crisis agenda includes discussing how democracy is intertwined with social change processes and capitalism, modernity/coloniality, and patriarchy. Democracy has new as well as old challenges that evolved historically and affected each other. The following sections further discuss such multiple features.

## Institutional crisis

In his contribution to the workshop, André Freire (University Institute of Lisbon, Portugal) stressed that crises are critical junctures in which the rules of the game are questioned. Therefore, it is worth differentiating the notion of crisis from the contemporary challenges of democracies - which include a decline in electoral participation and in the political parties' engagement, along with citizens' distrust in representatives. Freire situated the roots of the contemporary crisis in the double withdrawal of voters and political parties (Mair, 2013). The oligarchization processes that struck political systems is another pivotal element of the present crisis, according to Freire. Additionally, he stated, we are witnessing the reduction of the space for party competition and the growing collusion of parties, once situated as "center-left" and "center-right", resulting in a partial overlap of their positions. Figuring out when and why the challenges of democracy lead to democratization or to its erosion remains an interesting research question for those interested in the subject (Rosanvallon, 2008).

During the workshop, Leonardo Avritzer (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil) stressed three institutional features of the contemporary crisis. Currently, criticism to real-existing democracies is not necessarily leading to more intense and higher levels of democratization or to inclusive demos compositions, but to more restrictive ones. In parallel, the idea that some key democratic institutions - such as civil society organizations, large associations, and participatory democracy initiatives - would always play a role in protecting and broadening democracy is no longer uncontested, given that we are witnessing several of them contributing to de-democratization.

Furthermore, Avritzer singled out two other features of the contemporary crisis that, he suggests, should be at the core of this new research agenda. The contemporary crisis in the U.S. and European countries jeopardizes the idea that democracy is always stable in first-wave democratic countries, whose historical experiences have shaped democracies elsewhere as well as democratic theory itself. Finally, Avritzer highlighted the idea that democracies in the 21st century are not necessarily threatened by authoritarian coups that change political order from one day to another. In fact, democracies are currently eroding from the inside (Runciman, 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). For Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), in the current crisis, political elites can no longer operate an efficient gatekeeping system - which begs the question of why said system is not working. Those authors' approach, however, is rooted in the US experience; it is thus not possible to generalize the gatekeeping idea to other countries.

For Avritzer, one of the most relevant challenges for democracies today derives from the disembedding of the economy from regulatory institutions. The systems of political representation built after World War II and the third wave of democracy were not able to contain economical liberal reforms that delved into the illegitimacy of the political system. This implies that the current research agenda needs to go beyond political institutions and to think about ways of re-embedding (Polanyi, 1980; Blyth *et al.*, 2002) when building new forms of citizenship.

During the workshop, Boaventura de Sousa Santos considered that the socio-economic dimension of the crisis is visible nowadays because it is reaching the so-called civilized side of

the abyssal line: the democratic metropolitan sociability. Neoliberalism has changed the relationship between capitalism and democracy; in other words, neoliberalism only becomes compatible with democracy if social rights are taken away. This condition results in the coexistence of political democracy with social fascism. Currently, neoliberalism is also at odds with democratic institutions. This kind of neofascism has always been present, enforcing itself against the people on the other side of the abyssal line. Now, is hitting the "civilized" zone, and thus receives wider attention.

In short, we are facing a double crisis: a) the crisis of the welfare systems, characteristic of neoliberal hegemony, and the disembedding of the economy; and b) the crisis of legitimacy of the classic representative institutions of liberal democracies (which are not being able to respond to the demands of the citizenship). This situation is leading, in many countries, to a populist response. Populism has become one of the most relevant elements of the current crisis in democracies, either because it is considered that we live in a populist moment, or because the presence of different populist movements and/or their access to power is deepening some of the critical elements of current democracies.

André Freire underlined two perspectives on the debates around populism. For the first perspective, populism is an ideology that criticizes the established power; it is, however, a 'thin' ideology, which needs strong host ideologies to enforce itself. This explains why populism sticks to processes as different as Orbán in Hungary, Trump in the USA, Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Evo Morales in Bolivia. The same is true for new political parties like Podemos, in Spain, or La France Insoumise, in France, which encompass a strong democratic drive (the appeal to the people) that is opposed to liberal democracies.

The second perspective is represented by Chantal Mouffe's definition of left populism (2018). She defends that populism is a way of doing politics that can take multiple forms, starting from the fundamental elements that make up the populist strategy. Her proposal is to build a left-wing populism, which can reconcile a radicalized form of democracy with political liberalism but that challenges the neoliberal hegemony. This proposal, however, has received some criticism regarding its undemocratic nature. Cohen (2019) argues that it is not possible to democratize democracy through populism fundamentally because, like its right-wing nemesis, left-wing populism, when in power, has an elective affinity with "competitive authoritarianism." In this sense, the research agenda would not be focused so much on how to make populism more democratic, but rather on how to democratize democracy going beyond populist strategies.

## A historical approach

A historical approach may render clear that the very theoretical matrix we have been deploying for grasping - and building - democracy needs to be revisited, in order to find sharper tools for dealing with issues such as the role of conflicts in democratic history, colonial difference, and the abyssal lines that keep the populations from the global South separate (Santos, 2007). We now list some of the possible research agendas that follow this historical perspective.

We need to modify the theoretical references from which we think about democracy, underlining the virtues of Tilly's approaches (2007), as pointed out during the workshop by Leonardo Avritzer. In fact, much of hegemonic democratic theory has taken the United States as a benchmark for thinking about democracy. The US, however, advanced step by step towards democratic consolidation. Tilly stated that the French case, a conflictive path, is more useful to analyze the contentious character of the democratic construction process.

Another research agenda must be built around "the Colonial Question". In fact, the historical development of western democracies, both in their welfare systems and in their civic



norms, requires the expansion of colonialism and the associated social, political, and epistemological violence. Democracy and colonial expansion are two faces of the same story: its luminous body and its dark body, as Achille Mbembe (2015) reminds us. Boaventura de Sousa Santos himself insisted, during the workshop, on the role of democracy's colonial matrix, and on how it was built by establishing abyssal lines that divided the world and each society in an almost fractal way. This separation ensured democracy would correspond to the metropolitan side of sociability, while the other side of the abyssal line corresponded to violence and social fascism.

Finally, an historical approach leads to a third central agenda, that of unveiling the symbolic rivals of democracy and how they evolve over time. In the workshop, Boaventura de Sousa Santos recalled that, historically, democracy was thought of as a revolutionary process, after which it was opposed to the revolution (as a possible means to achieve the same goal: socialism) and, finally, contrasted to authoritarianism. Democracy went from being considered as a revolutionary process to a political system compatible with capitalism, despite their apparently contradictory principles (inclusion and popular sovereignty on the side of democracy, the infinite accumulation and concentration of wealth on the side of capitalism). The current crisis may indicate the end of this historical configuration, so that democracy and capitalism definitely stop presenting themselves as compatible.

### **The Internet reshapes political practices and its democratic impacts**

The impacts of the world wide web in politics were another pressing issue tackled by the workshop. Technological developments impact politics since, at least, the invention of the press (Runciman, 2018). Furthermore, the emergence of electronic means of communication led to the radio and mass politics in the twentieth century (Habermas, 1989). In the vast agenda of technology and politics, keynote speaker Marisa von Bülow (University of Brasília, Brazil) summarized the trajectory of digital activism studies: from its emergence with the Zapatistas' use of the internet for international visibility and mobilization of potential allies in 1994, to the current scenario in which the internet is shaping politics as a whole.

In general, the tone of the studies on this topic tended to range from strong optimism - the idea that digital exchanges could create a new world (Barlow, 1996) - to the pessimism of those who fear surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2018). By revisiting this history, von Bülow's research agenda avoided both underestimation and over-estimation traps, indicating that analysts should steer clear of an exclusive focus on social media platforms and online ties, looking beyond timelines and mapping the embeddedness of actors, both in online and offline networks. She also suggested studies should go beyond single platforms, paying attention to their interconnections and to gatekeepers. Additionally, researchers should be careful with the idea of novelty, for it does not necessarily lie in the technology itself, but on the way the creation of ties and coordination of action evolves.

This research agenda, von Bülow stressed, bridges the Internet studies, social movements' and electoral studies, and focuses on activism and agency, moving beyond technology affordances. She defined digital activism as "practices that seek political impacts in a specific context through digital technologies" (von Bülow, Vilaça and Abelin, 2019). For an agency-centered and relational approach, the research questions should refer to such processes, presupposing indeterminate impacts on power relations and on democracy. Finally, both the uses of technologies and the outcomes of activism may differ according to actors' ideologies, backgrounds, and embeddedness in social networks.

In the paper *Google it! Brazil's 2018 election*, a group of researchers from University of Brasília (Brazil) discussed the effects of digital technology on democracy by analyzing the

potential impacts for electoral processes of Google searches. Google is the most widely used search engine around the world, but its political impacts remain understudied. The authors propose an innovative methodology, based on experiments of creating avatar email accounts that represent the digital behavior of a variety of voters, and then assessing the search results. They conclude that search results around the topic of 2018 Brazilian elections were concentrated on a small number of online mainstream media sources, while social media and alternative media sources played smaller roles.

In the second paper, Pedro Abelin bridges a thriving debate in the current crisis of democracy: the new right-wing and the building of populist discourses via social media, specifically Facebook. Abelin analyses how the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) conceives political parties and justifies its relationship with them between denial and necessity. The author is concerned with the implications of the use of technology for political activism and with the challenges of bypassing parties - classic political gatekeepers. The main data sources are the MBL's publications on its Facebook page, from 2015 to 2017.

### **Planetary crisis: Disputed narratives and open outcomes**

For keynote speaker Stefania Barca (University of Coimbra, Portugal), one of the most relevant elements of the ongoing democratic crisis is the conflict around the narratives of the ecological crisis. The hegemonic discourse is one of eco-efficiency and eco-modernization in the Anthropocene. This widespread sense of the climate crisis informs most climate-related policies. This discourse was developed by the United Nations Environmental Program and has deep roots in the economic narratives of the 1960s. It focuses on the virtues of economic growth and poses the following as fundamental problems: how to increase growth, and/or how the politics of development can bring growth where there is none. Such a vision began to be questioned with the Growth Limits Report (Meadows, 1972), which understood that capitalism (development) can be sustained by an eco-efficient use of resources and by eco-modernization. The document, however, produced a negative political consequence, that is, the notion of sustainable development. The current discourse on the subject has shifted the focus from sustainable development to resilience as a political narrative. Resilience means the capacity of ecosystems to respond to stress and to reconfigure themselves based on environmental conditions.

The Rio +20 Summit was, according to Stefania Barca, the stage on which the conflict between narratives and political proposals became more evident. On the one hand, the official eco-modernization narrative, under the motto "The Future We Want", stated that we can solve the eco-crisis through a green economy, based on technology that would alter climate conditions. On the other hand, the alternative Rio + 20 meeting, where movements linked to climate justice under the motto "Another Future is Possible", gathered a set of alternative proposals based on counter-hegemonic narratives - such as eco-feminism, social ecology, degrowth or the ecological-debt. These movements state that the green economy is a post-political construction, aimed at enhancing the capitalist model and its technologies.

The green economy is accused by alternative movements of promoting symbolic violence through various suppression mechanisms - colonialism, ecocides, inequalities - thus making the alternative models disappear from the hegemonic narratives. For Barca, alternatives to modernization need to build Counter Master-narratives, based, among other things, on narrative justices. This implies telling the right stories about nature (no longer framed as a geological force to be dominated) and about our past, a fundamental process to make sense of our current situation and determine the policies that we need, including alternatives to modernization.

Giulia Malavasi's text proposes a clear example of this type of counter-narrative. Malavasi employs environmental history to analyze the links between the ecological and democratic crises in the Italian town of Manfredonia (where a large petrochemical plant existed, between the 1970s and 90s). She does so by resorting to a participatory historical research, undertaken as a part of a multidisciplinary project (Ambiente Salute Manfredonia) that involved epidemiologists, physicists, one sociologist, and one historian, working together with local institutions and citizens to assess the town's situation. On the one hand, this piece of research manages to mobilize silenced local narratives that face the narrative injustices suffered by the population. On the other hand, it helps Malavasi examine the conflicts that occurred in that community with regard to the installation of the Manfredonian petrochemical plant (for example, the disputes between workers and environmentalists) and to the forms of local mobilization (especially women's) in defense of that territory.

## A global crisis with regional features

Although the current crisis simultaneously affects old and new democracies, it emerges within specific historical and geographical settings. While Europe struggles with the impacts of the European Union, Latin American states deal with inequalities and slow democratization processes; along with African countries, they keep struggling with colonialism and the uneasy translation of democratic Euro-American institutions into pre-existing diverse political systems. Within given regions, national-level comparative studies would be a welcomed agenda as well.

When analyzing Europe, André Freire placed Europeanization and globalization in the center of the contemporary democratic crisis, as both are reducing the space of democratic competition and limiting the operation of representative systems. The power of the European Union poses the general problem of reducing the representatives' capacity to enforce electoral programs and to be responsive to their citizens' preference. The EU, thus, undermines delegation procedures. Citizens, for their turn, realize that, by voting, they can change the government but not the policies, something that creates dissatisfaction. Greece was the extreme case, but similar examples are to be found in Spain and the UK.

The EU could be viewed as an instrument that domesticates globalization, but instead it has become a sort of trojan horse, in which elected governments have to compromise with other governments and institutions (some of which have not even been elected). Additionally, the free capital's movements are limiting the capacity of the national representatives to enforce social protection, as the latter are pushed to increase deregulation policies. This, for Freire, posed a trilemma: we cannot have democracy, nation states, and neoliberal globalization altogether. Avritzer also highlighted the relevance of observing the intertwining of politics and economy.

Emma Álvarez's paper contributes to these concerns by exploring the crisis of social citizenship in the European Union and the collapse of the post-World War II social contract throughout the continent. Social citizenship is the idea that democratic freedom and equality can only be effective if all citizens enjoy certain economic security. It has been considered as an essential part of democracy over the last 70 years, but recent changes in the labor market and the neoliberal reforms have been undermining the state's capacity to guarantee social and economic rights. This process creates a division: "insiders" that fully enjoy their social and economic rights, and "outsiders" with a limited access to these liberties. Outsiders are subject to constant uncertainty and instability and, therefore, are less able to fully participate in society or exercise their freedoms. Moreover, the definition of citizenship has historically excluded the rights of women, the LGTBI+ community, and ethnic minorities, affecting the design of

welfare policies and equal access to social rights. Alvarez proposes alternatives that can lead to a new and richer definition of social citizenship from a radically democratic perspective.

In Latin America, where the welfare state was a limited experience, similar problems of inclusion demand some attention to the specific features that occur, seen as democratic challenges also involve extending social and political rights to numerous sectors of the population. The issue of political inclusion of rural people is the focus of Elisa Garcia's paper. Luiza Lima's paper, on the other hand, focuses on the challenges of human rights for indigenous peoples in Brazil, showing the local features of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and how they affect indigenous women, as ethnicity and gender intersect as sources of discrimination. Her work shows the complexities of gender as a political category in indigenous communities and, in the best tradition of activist-scholars, claims that non-mainstream feminism could foster gender-based demands for the agenda of the indigenous social movements – which are, in turn, essential for keeping a rights-oriented and inclusive agenda alive.

Coloniality connects Latin America and Africa, even though it generates specificities in each region. Keynote speaker Maria Paula Meneses (Coimbra University, Portugal) approached democracy from the standpoint of the construction of post-colonial African nation-states. The latter were established after the colonial division of the continent in the eighteenth century tried to erase different social groups living in those territories. The emerging African countries assumed the form of nation-states in order to exist in the world system, while dealing with the recurrent epistemic and ontological violence that, among other features, denies local political institutions. In their diversity, these countries pose key challenges for democratic theory as they host plural cultural and political groups, whose political organizations are hardly grasped by occidental democratic models. Summarizing, *demo*-diversity challenges democracy, and scholars still have limited understanding about the democratic innovations carried out under the imprints of colonialism (Santos and Mendes, 2020).

Three specific challenges emerge from the African experience. First, any possible effort of decolonization – of overcoming the colonial legacy – challenges scholars and politicians to relearn and conceptualize the notions of democracy, participation, state, and sovereignty in a relational manner that effectively considers the political institutions preceding the colonial encounter/clash. This should include the very idea of individual participation, which is at the basis of liberal democracies but can be problematic in cultures where personal existence is not disconnected from that of social groups.

Second, it is necessary to overcome the idea that the only possible democratic experiences mirror the democracies of the global North. There are alternative forms of political representation or of the ways in which communities negotiate with the national state. The final challenge is thus questioning the assumption that modern nation-states are the only and the best option, opening up the possibility for other imaginaries of the political community, the *demos*, where different forms of political representation can take place.

Alem Werede's paper gives us a broad perspective of the recent practices of political elites in different African democratic systems. This work questions the real impact of democratization processes in Africa by drawing from various countries, which shows the process of reduction of the variety of political arenas. Werede points to the historical roots in the decolonization process of the dominant parties on the continent. Various of these dominant parties have adopted, between 2016 and 2018, leadership resignation (Seychelles, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, and Ethiopia) as a strategy to stay in power in the face of the political and social changes being experienced. Werede analyzes the consequences of these practices, which consolidate the power of elites and establishes the main demands of African democracies today.

## Can citizens' participation respond to the current crisis of democracy?

In the present context of crisis, democratic innovations could be imagined as playing a significant role because of their ability to counterbalance populism, transcend polarization, improve the legitimacy of democracies, and incorporate citizen judgment into the public discussion (Dryzek *et al.*, 2019). During the workshop, Giovanni Allegretti (Centre for Social Studies of Coimbra University, Portugal) pointed out the need for reframing participatory tools and linking them to new narratives (not only neoliberal ones, like new public management). These new narratives have to do with issues like the right to the city, the protection and share management of the commons, spatial justice, and socio-environmental justice. Such versions are also related to the transition from an analytical framework, mostly focused on institutional arrangements that we can define (using Pedro Ibarra's definition) as "participation by invitation", to new ways of institutional dialogue, based on bottom-up process that can be typified as "participation by irruption" (Ibarra and Ahedo, 2007).

Allegretti insisted that participatory processes have to be in permanent and incremental transformation because they are a part of democracy (which always is a process of constant change); but also, that they need to be shaped around the goal of transforming the attitudes, the behavior of and the relations among the participating actors, especially through dialogue, deliberation, and mutual listening. The possibility of transforming the actors and the local contexts where democratic innovations take place has to be evaluated - not from the perspective of ideal models, but in close relation to the real places and conjunctures where participatory practices are developed. This presupposes the need to evaluate how intense a given democracy was before the citizens' engagement began. For such transformations to occur, each participatory "technology" must be adapted when implemented in a certain territory. These adaptations have to face the tensions between the individual and communal forms of participation, and they have to do it by employing different means creatively so as to make the Other visible, and favor an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2007).

Finally, Allegretti pointed out two very relevant current trends. On the one hand, a tendency for participatory colonialism, developed by institutions of the Washington Consensus, especially in Africa and Asia. On the other hand, the progressive complexity of the themes that are debated in a participatory manner, such as the elaboration or reform of constitutions, or the development of public policies at the state level (including issues related to environmental changes, energy sources and production, etc.). The change of scale in democratic innovation oscillates around the following elements: a) basic service provision and social policies of proximity; b) holistic and integrative policies and programs; and c) the defense of human rights.

For a long time, Brazil has been observed and valued as the country which developed the most complex participatory system in the world. But it is also one of the countries that has experienced the most rapid degradation of its democracy, since 2013. Magalhães, Ornellas and Brasil's text presents an analysis of both phenomena. On the one hand, taking the 2013 mobilizations as a starting point, they present an analysis of the structural, institutional, and political elements of the crisis in the Brazilian political system. On the other hand, they map out the development of the Brazilian participatory system and the conflicts surrounding its institutionalization. The relationship between the more general perspective of the country's democratic crisis and the particular development of participatory institutions helps us to examine what their limits are, as well as their possibilities for deepening a democratic approach.

Within the agenda for the democratization of democracy, the relations between the state and social movements in the design of public policies have always constituted a conflictive

element. Elisa Garcia approaches this topic through the oral histories of activists from social organizations, unions, associations, and cooperatives located in the Zona da Mata area, Minas Gerais. Starting from the dilemmas between contentious action and institutionalization, her research analyzes the ways of representation and organization in these family farming organizations. Her article leads us to problematize concepts such as autonomy or cooptation, and to advance in the complexity necessary to pinpoint and examine the concrete relationships between the capacity of mobilization of both social movements and institutional actions.

## An open conclusion

As we are publishing this Cescontexto issue, the world is facing a pandemic that highlights some of the matters under discussion – from a few regional features to the role of the welfare state and public policies. The pandemic may also be deepening many of the crisis' elements. In several countries, states of exception (or alarm) have been created, under normal democratic constitutional rules. Some of them may endure as the new mode of government, unquestioned by the majority of citizens. This “new normality”, where the exception becomes the rule, generates a significant discomfort for the future of democracy. At the same time, we are witnessing important social polarization in some countries, reinforcing the need to face an important question: are democracies better equipped for defending the rights of citizens in the face of crises of such magnitude? Some authors point out that democracies do not represent a differentiating element for the effectiveness of the citizens' protection in these situations (Hayat, 2020). In countries with eroded democracies, coordination actions seem difficult. This has visible effects on the outcome of a government's capacities to articulate comprehensive and effective responses. Brazil is possibly the most dramatic example.

We can imagine that the Covid-19 pandemic will reinforce either the regression or the innovation dynamics of contemporary democracies. For example, it is already clear how unequal the distribution of impacts has been, in a close relation with pre-existing situations of social inequality and/or access to welfare systems. The political management of the pandemic will have an impact on the current and future democratic imaginary; on the quality of public spheres and the management of fake news; on the already mentioned impact of inequalities, that is, on who has the right to participate in the crisis's administration and how more or less epistocratic answers are given to this question. These are just some of the elements that will determine which democracies we will be able to count on after the pandemic.

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## Social citizenship and the crisis of democracy. Welfare state reform from a radically democratic perspective

Emma Rose Álvarez Cronin,<sup>1</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

**Abstract:** In 1950, T.H. Marshall argued that “social citizenship” had become an essential part of democracy. This form of citizenship, which is the central pillar of the Keynesian Welfare State, came to recognize that the principals of freedom and equality could only be effective if all citizens enjoyed certain economic security. However, today, we find that the concept of social citizenship is in crisis. The labour market can no longer guarantee full employment or stable and well-paid jobs and neoliberal reform has diminished the state’s capacity to guarantee social and economic rights. Moreover, the definition of citizenship has historically excluded the rights of women, the LGTBI+ community and ethnic minorities, affecting the design of welfare policies and equal access to social rights. The aim of this article is to analyse the social crisis we face in the EU, its relation to the crisis of democracy and, finally, a series of alternative proposals that can lead us to a new and richer definition of social citizenship from a radically democratic perspective.

**Keywords:** social citizenship, welfare state, social security, feminism, sustainable development

### Democracy, social citizenship and the Keynesian Welfare State

In liberal democracies, to be a citizen is to be a rightful member of a political community, entitled to a series of rights and bound by a series of duties (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). It is a status based on the principle that “all individuals are born free and equal” (Mouffe, 1992: 83). However, the concept of citizenship has been constantly enriched with time, as historical struggles have forced the state to progressively recognize a wider range of rights. Therefore, the evolution of liberal democracy has gone hand in hand with the evolution of citizenship: the rights attached to this concept and the scope of people entitled to these rights (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). In other words, who is considered a citizen and what it means to be one. Civil rights recognize essential freedoms, such as the right to physical integrity or the freedom of speech, thought and faith. Political rights, on the other hand, refer to citizen’s active participation in society, and include the right of assembly or the right to vote.

Social rights — or third-generation rights — are a result of the constant struggle of workers’ movements, together with the fear of the advance of communism and the trauma of the rise of fascism (Duffy, 2016). After World War II, Western democracies were forced to seek real solutions to the extreme inequalities that the capitalist economy was creating. As T.H. Marshall argued, the inclusion of social rights in the status of citizenship means

<sup>1</sup> Graduate in International Relations (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) with an MA in Economic Development and Public Policies (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid).

a general enrichment of the concrete substance of civilised life, a general reduction of risk and insecurity, an equalisation between the more and the less fortunate at all levels —between the healthy and the sick, the employed and the unemployed, the old and the active, the bachelor and the father of a large family. (1992:56)

This would lead us to a new form of citizenship, *social citizenship*, which comes to recognize that, in order to be included in society, to be free and participate as an equal, all citizens must be guaranteed a certain level of economic security. This implies a new, very close relationship between democracy and the recognition of certain social and economic rights. Moreover, it requires a greater state intervention in the economy, which will result in the development of what we call the welfare state.

The Keynesian Welfare State (KWS) is the result of the post-World War II social contract, and is essentially linked to the Fordist model of production, as well as its labour market structure. Previously, during the industrial revolution, labour was simply considered another factor of production, subject to the law of offer and demand. In this sense, workers were at the mercy of market fluctuations and were completely dependent on wage labour to subsist. It was a period of grave inequalities and poverty amongst the working class, where unemployment was a devastating phenomenon (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, Esping-Andersen explains that the KWS was born recognizing an essential truth, which is that “workers are not commodities like others, because they must survive and reproduce both themselves and the society they live in” (1990: 37). In this sense, he defends “de-commodification” is also a central concept in the birth of the welfare state. It expresses the need to assure a “socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation” (1990:37). Moreover, Esping-Andersen understands a “socially acceptable standard of living” as a level of income above the poverty threshold, which means, beyond 60% of the average median national income.

How do we measure the extent to which the welfare state de-commodifies labour and guarantees equal access to social and economic rights? The Keynesian Welfare State is equipped with three main instruments: fiscal policy, which should be progressive, public services such as education, healthcare or social services, and monetary transfers, where we find social security benefits — primarily composed by unemployment benefits, pensions and minimum guaranteed incomes policies. The KWS can use and combine these instruments to achieve three main goals: full employment, economic security and the reduction of inequalities (Serrano and García, 2014).

When it comes to measuring the size of the welfare state, we can use the indicator of social expenditure, which also allows us to compare countries. However, Esping-Andersen (1990), points out that, to measure the effectiveness of social policies, we must take into account three more factors.

First, the accessibility of benefits, which is determined by the existence of conditionality measures and other restrictions. Second, the level of income replacement; in other words, if benefits allow citizens to reach a socially acceptable level of income. Third, the scope of the rights or entitlements provided, if they are universal, job centred, if they depend on nationality, etc.

Lastly, the scope of the welfare state also depends on the level of state intervention in the labour market. Expansive economic policies allow the KWS to stimulate the economy and create jobs in order to guarantee full employment. However, State intervention also includes the constitution of a specific labour-market regime. This involves social protection in case of unemployment or inability to work (in case of illness, disability, old age, etc.), but also labour market regulations: establishing a minimum wage, legal working hours, a typology of contracts, recognizing the right to organize, etc. (Del Pino and Ramos, 2015; Esping-Andersen, 1990).

## *The four worlds of welfare capitalism<sup>2</sup>*

When it comes to the European KWS, we cannot talk about a universal and invariable model. In fact, although they share similar bases and certain features, we can distinguish between at least three, and even four, different regimes. Each of them is based on different ideological principles and is conditioned by the state's regional economic position. More importantly, they lead to different consequences in terms of de-commodification of labour and welfare, so it is essential to understand the basic differences. In this sense, Esping-Andersen (1990) mentions three main models: the social democratic model, the conservative model and the liberal model.

The social democratic model, which has the greatest impact in terms of de-commodification and redistribution, is based on the principal that social rights have a universal scope, and accessibility depends solely on the status of citizenship. The conservative model, associated to the theses of Otto von Bismarck, is based on earnings-related social security systems. Social rights cannot be classed as universal because they are bound to the person's participation in the labour market and, therefore, to their class and social status, instead of his or her status as a citizen. In addition, high levels of labour market regulation and low levels of unemployment are central features of both model's labour-market regimes.

Thirdly, the liberal model, whose main ideologist is W.H. Beveridge, is mainly based on means-tested assistance. Social policies are aimed at the poorest and most vulnerable, and there is a high market dependency for families and individuals when it comes to welfare. However, in the UK, the scope of the welfare state is much higher than in other liberal models, such as the US or Australia. Additionally, although it does share low levels of unemployment with the former labour-market regimes, it is far less regulated.

Lastly, there is the Mediterranean welfare model, which developed in the heat of the democratization process in southern Europe during the 70's and 80's (Adelantado and Gomà, 2000). Esping-Andersen does not include this model in his categorization, nor do other authors, who state that these countries have essentially developed a conservative welfare model. However, I believe there are important differences that make this distinction necessary and analytically useful. This model combines social democratic elements, such as the universal scope of education or healthcare, with conservative elements, such as earnings-related social security systems. However, as unemployment is a structural problem in these countries, work centred welfare creates great inequalities and social exclusion. Lastly, it shares low levels of de-commodification and social expenditure with liberal models, as well as a deregulated labour market.

## **The Keynesian Welfare State in crisis: neoliberal reform and the crisis of wage labour**

During the golden age of Fordism, wage labour was able to guarantee acceptable standards of living in Europe thanks to an economic context of growth and a stable labour market structure. Work conditions were standardized and there had been great achievements in terms of equality, as the salary range had been narrowed and wages grew at the same pace as productivity. Jobs

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<sup>2</sup> The reason I am not including post-communist Eastern countries in the analysis is that, although most have a residual welfare state, their diversity makes it difficult to talk about a Post-communist welfare model (Couceiro and Adelantado, 2017).

were stable, permanent contracts were the norm, and work was an effective channel for social inclusion, as well as one of the main axes of individual identity (Dombois, 2002).

However, the crisis of the 1970's brought into question, first the productivity of advanced capitalist economies, and later the Fordist model of production as a whole. In addition, the process of globalization, technological revolution and the development of transnational supply chains, resulted in a process of deindustrialization in the most enriched countries, accompanied by the rise of the service sector and knowledge

Primarily, in a post-industrial economic context with predominantly tertiary economies, wage labour no longer translates into economic security, nor does it provide any certainties, as low-skilled workers are in and out of temporary, part-time jobs with low wages (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Moscoso, 2003). This has obvious and profound consequences for the Keynesian Welfare State, as it was designed on the basis of a closed economy, steady technological changes and industrial employment (Standing, 2017). As Guy Standing states, “the most important reason for the degradation of the social security system is that today’s economic insecurity is profoundly different, at least in its structure, from that prevailing in the mid-twentieth century” (2017: 88).

Nonetheless, although the crisis of the KWS was set alight by the crisis of the 70's, and the changes it brought to the structure of the economy and the labour market, it was ultimately fuelled by the reforms that took place under the neoliberal paradigm.

### *The Workfare State*

In enriched economies, since the 80's, governments have chosen to undertake a neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state as a strategy to adapt social policies to a post-industrial economic order. The Workfare State paradigm promotes market-orientated welfare, and its premise is not to guarantee economic security —nor full employment and equality— but workers employability. Therefore, as Gilbert describes, there has been a shift “from emphasising social rights, to the civic duties of community members” (2002: 5).

Consequently, reforms have aimed at reinforcing work-oriented policies, privatizing social-welfare, increasing assistance policies and reducing state intervention in the labour market. Firstly, this has translated into policy reforms to increase labour flexibility and reduce labour rights, as deregulation has been the main recipe to gain competitiveness in a globalised economy (Prosser, 2016). Secondly, there have been important structural reforms to social security systems. As public investment moves towards active employment policies, passive policies have been cut: the duration of unemployment benefits has gone down, and so has their level of income replacement, conditionality has become stricter and, in many cases, qualification periods have been extended, making it harder for workers who have an unstable relationship with the labour market to qualify. Finally, means-tested assistance has risen. This includes policies such as unemployment subsidies, minimum guaranteed income benefits or non-contributory social services, which are far less generous than work related benefits (Adelantado and Gomà, 2000)

Although reforms have mostly gone in the same direction, there are essential differences within the EU. For conservative and Mediterranean welfare models, with earnings-related social security systems, the labour market transformations have strongly affected workers' levels of social protection. In this context, countries like France have installed minimum income benefits directed at poor workers, but southern countries like Spain or Greece centre their resources to face high unemployment rates, and pay little attention to in-work poverty (Zalakain, 2014). Social democratic regimes have also shifted towards work-orientated policies, but they still conserve high levels of social protection (Moreno y Marí-Klose, 2016). Finally, liberal regimes like the UK have led the neoliberal reform process, further insisting on

assistance-based welfare policies and the privatisation of services such as healthcare and education (Deeming, 2015).

All these market-oriented reforms transfer the risks and uncertainties created by globalised markets, directly, to workers. Ultimately, they diminish the welfare state's redistributive power and turn it into an agent of social stratification. This means that, far from reducing social inequalities, welfare policies are reinforcing them (Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012).

## Social dualisation in the European Union

The rise of inequality in the European Union, and all Western democracies, is not only a consequence of the Great Recession in 2008, but a trend that started in the 1970's and has carried on until today. The 2015 OECD report, entitled "In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All" states that, today, in OECD countries, the richest 10% earn almost ten times more than the poorest 10%, while in the 1980s they earned 7 times more. This means that the rich have been getting richer very fast while the poor have experienced a very slow income growth, and are ever more vulnerable to economic crises. In the EU, while inequality has risen in all countries — although less so in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>— social exclusion indicators are also extremely worrying. For 2017, 22,4% of people were at risk of social exclusion, and this phenomenon especially affects young people between 16-24 (29%), unemployed people (33,2%), migrants from extra-EU countries (44,1%) and single parent families (41%),<sup>4</sup> mostly headed by women.

Moreover, the specific conditions in which this rise of inequality and social exclusion are taking place, have led many to talk about a process of social dualisation between "insiders" and "outsiders".

While employment for low skilled workers comes from the service sector, with low levels of productivity growth, precarious work conditions and scarce unionisation, high-skilled workers have seen their income rise, as they are highly demanded in sectors of knowledge-based economy (OECD, 2015). However, social dualisation is not only a problem of income inequality. The division between "insiders" and "outsiders" is also related to an unequal access to social and economic rights, and that is a direct consequence of political reform:

[...] Policies increasingly differentiate rights, entitlements and services provided to different categories of recipients. Thereby, the position of insiders may remain more or less constant while only the position of outsiders deteriorates. (Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012: 10).

In this sense, the notion "dualisation" also comes to emphasise the political intention behind this process. Governments and international institutions could have chosen other reform strategies and public policies to adapt welfare regimes to a post-Fordist economic context.

Lastly, we must also take into account that social exclusion comes in multiple forms, which create quite a different social context from that of the mid-twentieth century: from the working poor and the unemployed, to lone parents, immigrants from impoverished countries and young people who suffer precarious work conditions and unemployment. The "outsiders" category is also cut across by inequalities based on race, gender or age, and is all but a homogeneous group of white male workers. However, neither Keynesian welfare, nor market-orientated welfare, have been designed to answer to this ever more complex and diverse reality.

3 OECD (2015), In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All, OECD Publishing, Paris, Consulted in 3.10.2019 at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264235120-en>.

4 European Commission (2019) "Living conditions and welfare" Accessed 23.09.2019. Online database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

What we see today is an essential contradiction: institutions are re-commodifying the labour force and creating work-centred policies precisely at the moment when the labour market is less capable of guaranteeing economic security and stability through wage labour. In essence, this means that no agent, neither the market nor the State, is taking responsibility in guaranteeing socially acceptable standards of living to all citizens.

The ultimate consequence of this process is that, today, in our societies, there are first and second-class citizens. We have “insiders”, that fully enjoy their social and economic rights, and “outsiders”, that have a limited access to these rights, are subject to constant uncertainty and instability and, therefore, are less able to fully participate in society or exercise their freedoms. This reality, that represents the collapse of the post-World War II social contract, is a central factor to explain the crisis of democracy.

## **Towards a radically inclusive democracy**

Liberal democracies have developed the Keynesian Welfare State on the premise that no citizen can participate in society as an equal, or be truly free, without basic economic security. Therefore, in the current context, where neoliberalism has created unprecedented levels of inequality and broken down the pillars of our welfare states, can we say we live in truly democratic societies? Moreover, has the notion of social citizenship attached to the KWS ever guaranteed the equal status of all people?

The truth is that, although we cannot give in to neoliberalism – which would involve renouncing the concept of social citizenship and continuing to build a Workfare State that does not take any responsibility in guaranteeing basic standards of economic security – we cannot turn back time either.

As Guy Standing has stated, “the twentieth-century distribution system has broken down” (2017: 84). However, many also argue that the concept and content of social rights must further evolve, in order to guarantee real equality and freedom to all citizens (Powell, 2002; Mouffe, 2013; Duffy, 2016). In this sense, it seems necessary to build a new welfare model based on a renewed concept of social citizenship. This would imply adapting social and economic policies not only to the context of a post-industrial society, but also to a more complex and diverse reality, so power relations based on gender, sexuality, disability or race are also taken into account. As I will explain further on, this involves displacing the white heterosexual male as the main subject of welfare policies.

In other words, we need a new notion of social citizenship that integrates a radically democratic perspective. Quoting the philosopher Chantal Mouffe, this would imply building a new political identity with “a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality”, central to any liberal democratic regime. Which means they must be understood “in a way that takes account of the different social relations and subject positions in which they are relevant: gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on” (1992: 71).

Here, although I may not give a full answer to this question, I intend to describe some essential features that must be included in a radically democratic concept of social citizenship. More specifically, I aim at analysing three main approaches and political proposals that, I believe, are going to be at the centre of the debate in the coming decades. That is, the proposal of a Universal Basic Income, a feminist insight to democracy and welfare reform and, finally, the Green New Deal.

## **Social citizenship and Universal Basic income**

Social security systems are a key aspect of welfare, and they have also been an essential subject of neoliberal reform. Their effectiveness in redistributing income and de-commodifying labour

has been gravely affected by the transition towards the *Workfare State* paradigm, but also by changes in the labour market, related to technological change and globalisation.

As I described earlier, guaranteeing income security became a central element of citizenship and democracy in post-World War II Europe. This happened mainly because governments acknowledged that, exercising freedom and being truly equal, depends on economic independence and security. Therefore, if we do not want to take steps backwards in the process of democratisation by renouncing social rights, if we still believe the state should guarantee socially acceptable standards of living to all citizens, we need new political proposals that can allow our social security systems to adapt to the post-industrial labour market.

In this sense, advocates of Universal Basic Income (UBI) argue that with political will it is possible. The definition proposed by the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) helps us to acknowledge the main difference between this proposal and our current social security systems: “a basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement” (Raventós, 2007: 8). In other words, it drastically shifts away from the current means-tested and work-centred paradigm, at the same time it goes forward in terms of universalisation of social and economic rights compared to the former Keynesian social security scheme.

This shift is essential, because independence from the market in a context where wage labour no longer translates into social inclusion is more necessary than ever, in order to guarantee democratic freedoms and social equality. Standing (2017) explains how means and behaviour tested benefits, together with bureaucratic obstacles meant to hinder people’s attempts to obtain benefits, create “precarity traps”.

When the only option people have is to accept short-term, part-time badly paid jobs, there is little incentive for them to abandon the benefits they are entitled to, as there is very little to gain in terms of stability, certainty or income. This means that, although many neoliberal economists argue that a UBI would act as a disincentive for people to work, it is the current system, which they designed, that is creating these types of problems. A Universal Basic Income, with no conditionality attached, regardless of other income sources, could actually be a solution for people to escape from this trap. In other words, taking away the risk of losing social benefits could incentivise people to work much more so than punitive and restrictive social policies.

To this regard, the results from the Finnish basic income experiment (2017-2018), provide very interesting empirical evidence. The main aim of this experiment was to study the impact of a basic income on labour market participation. Out of a nation-wide random sample of 175.000 people who received basic unemployment benefits, 2.000 were given an unconditional basic income, while the rest were used as a control group. The study revealed that, although the basic income had not created a higher incentive to work, there were no significant differences in labour market behaviour between citizens who were granted a BI and those who perceived basic unemployment benefits. Moreover, the basic income entailed less bureaucracy and higher life satisfaction and well-being for those who perceived it.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, to ensure all citizens have the right to socially acceptable living standards, it is also important that a UBI policy guarantees a sufficient level of income. During the last decades, as work instability and unemployment have risen, so have the number of people who receive or depend on social security benefits. However, the levels of income replacement are

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<sup>5</sup> Kangas, Olli (2019). First results from the Finnish basic income experiment, ESPN Flash Report 2019/17, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission. Consulted in 10.12.2019 at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20846&langId=en>

rarely able to guarantee living standards above the poverty threshold (Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012). That is why authors such as Raventós (2007), Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) or Standing (2017) argue that it is necessary, and also possible, to design a UBI with a level of income replacement above the poverty threshold; which, by definition, would eradicate the phenomenon of social exclusion in all Europe.

Our societies today are characterised by chronic insecurity. If citizens have no guarantee of social inclusion, neither through wage labour, nor through welfare, we condemn them — especially low skilled workers — to fundamental uncertainty. And with fear, insecurity and economic deprivation, it is almost impossible to participate in society with freedom. If we understand that there is no way back to industrial labour, even if essential labour rights are restored, the post-industrial welfare state must adapt, not by withdrawing, but by further insisting on de-commodifying labour. Furthermore, as I will argue next, our social security systems must move forward and acknowledge that there are many forms of social contribution, which do not necessarily belong to the productive sphere of the economy or involve wage labour.

## Social citizenship and feminism

Feminism has a lot to say about the definition of social citizenship, as well as the design of the Keynesian Welfare State and its current crisis. On one hand, Pateman (1988) argues that the liberal definition of citizenship is largely male centred. The private/public distinction, essential since the recognition of civil rights, has also been a factor of exclusion and subordination for women. When it comes to social citizenship, this distinction means that all activities that belong to the “domestic” sphere, traditionally related to women, are completely ignored when defining social rights and deciding the scope of the welfare state. Therefore, it is not a case of extending the existing rights to women, so they are considered first class-citizens, but of redefining social rights – as well as civic and political rights – with a feminist perspective.

On the other hand, Nancy Fraser (1994) has discussed that the crisis of the welfare state is largely influenced by the fall of the industrial gender order. This order implied that people were organised in male-headed heterosexual family units with a sexual division of labour, where the man was the breadwinner and women were care providers. In addition, it was based on the existence of a “family wage”, which meant that a whole family could live with only one income. However, today, the family wage no longer exists, as at least two salaries are necessary to maintain a family —and, sometimes, they are still insufficient. Secondly, families have diversified, so the traditional model no longer prevails and alternative types of family have arisen, such as single parent families, families with two breadwinners, families without children or non-heterosexual families. Lastly, women’s incorporation into the labour market has made the traditional definition of full employment unsustainable, as, in its origin, it is male centred.

Nonetheless, the neoliberal reform of the welfare state, far from adapting to this context and promoting a more equal gender order, is pushing to restore the male breadwinner/female homemaker family model (Fraser, 1994). Consequently, once women enter the labour market, they do not abandon or share care work, but take on a double burden. In addition, as the power of the private market grows and social benefits are cut back, families —more specifically, women— are forced to pick up the care work no longer provided by the state (Luxton and Bezanson, 2006).

The deregulation of the labour market has also had a grave impact on women’s lives, as the double burden pushes them to accept part-time, temporary and badly paid jobs more often



than men do. In EU countries<sup>6</sup> 30,8% of working women have a part-time contract, and this figure rises up to 73,8% in the Netherlands and 46,7% in Germany. The gender pay gap is 16% for the EU, 20% in the UK and 21% in Germany. Of course, these differences in earnings have consequences in terms of access to social and economic rights, for example, when it comes to pensions. While 16,8% of retired men are at risk of social exclusion within the EU, 20,5% of retired women are in this situation. In cases like Sweden, a social democratic regime, this number is still 20,6%, while in Mediterranean countries such as Greece it rises to 26,3%.

All of these factors should make us reflect on how feminism can help us analyse and rethink our societies and, especially, our welfare regimes in the XXI century. Moreover, as more than 50% of EU citizens are women, we must consider gender a key analytical concept and look at our social policies with an intersectional feminist perspective.

### *Recognition and redistribution in the Post-industrial Welfare State*

The feminist and philosopher Nancy Fraser (1995) has also theorised about the complex, sometimes contradictory, but necessary combination of recognition and redistribution policies — which are the two essential dimensions of social justice — in order to build a Post-industrial Welfare State. This is because, although cultural and socioeconomic discrimination can be analytically distinguished, there is a very close relationship between both forms of social injustice, as they mutually determine and affect each other in different contexts.

Therefore, if we aim at building a radically democratic and inclusive welfare system, institutions must guarantee equal economic and social rights despite gender, class, race or sexual orientation, at the same time as they recognise and value social diversity. This is, ultimately, a necessary step to displace the heterosexual, white, male worker as the main subject of welfare policies, and it must be central when designing the new pillars of post-industrial welfare regimes.

If we consider this when applying a feminist political economy approach, we must understand that redistributive policies will only be effective if, at the same time, they recognise and reaffirm the importance of those economic spheres, traditionally related to women, which have been made invisible by conventional economic theory. However, this logic works both ways: recognising and giving social value to these economic activities will not translate into social justice if it does not come hand in hand with redistribution policies.

One of the main principles that feminist economists defend is that, rather than economic growth, we must put the satisfaction of human needs, the reproduction of life, at the centre of economic analysis. As authors like Orozco (2014) have argued, putting the sustainability of life at the centre means recognising all the activities that sustain life, while also giving them social value. This has many implications when it comes to designing welfare policies and defining the reality in which they operate.

Firstly, highlighting the unpaid work of women, that aims at sustaining and reproducing life, gives us the chance to redefine what we understand by work. As Nancy Fraser (1994) states, the current definition of work is “androcentric and inadequate”, as it does not include the reproductive sphere of economy, which is, in fact, essential to make the world go round.

Moreover, recognising this reality can have redistributive effects if it is accompanied by the displacement of wage labour as a central axis in the design of welfare policies. This would benefit not only women, but also society as a whole, especially low skilled workers.

<sup>6</sup> Data for the year 2018. European Commission (2019) “Living conditions and welfare” Accessed 23.09.2019. Online database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

Essentially, this is because work-centred policies do not only ignore the social contribution of reproductive and voluntary work, but also the fact that post-industrial labour markets, with precarious work conditions and low wages, no longer allow citizens to contribute through wage labour in the way they used to. Therefore, as advocates of a UBI also argue, economic security for all citizens can only be possible if social rights have a universal scope, rather than being tied to labour market participation.

Furthermore, if the welfare state limits itself to recognising the social value of care work, it may undertake policies that still insist on the sexual division of labour. This is the case of the Universal Breadwinner model, which is based on promoting women's participation in the labour market by helping women to carry their double burden, offering family-work conciliation policies such as promoting part-time jobs or maternity leave. The new welfare regime must be based on the Caregiver Parity model, recognise reproductive work as a collective responsibility and undertake redistributive policies in this sphere as well (Morán, 2013; Fraser, 1994). In this sense, welfare policies must promote equality between men and women—for example, with equal maternity and paternity leaves—, as well as the state's responsibility in social reproduction—for example, taking care of the elderly or guaranteeing nursery education. Finally, there must be changes in the labour market structure so wage labour is more compatible with social reproduction, including a general reduction of the working day for men and women.

### **The Green New Deal and social citizenship**

The concept of a Green New Deal was born in the US, and makes reference to Roosevelt's post-World War II "New Deal" (Hockett and Gunn-Wright, 2019). Advocates defend that, today, we are in a similar situation as we were then: our democracies need to promote political alternatives to neo-fascist movements and solutions to the social crisis created by globalised capitalism. However, this must now go hand in hand with leading a process of economic modernisation, based on the principle of sustainable development.

The capitalist system works based on the principle that land – in other words, the environment – is just another factor of production available to create economic growth. This means natural resources can be subject to the laws of offer and demand, and nature's limits are left out of the equation (Carpintero, 2010). Consequently, until now, economic growth and technological change have been based on the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources such as oil or coal. The capacity of the environment to absorb waste (CO2 emissions, plastic, toxic waste, etc.) has also been completely ignored by conventional economic theory (Christensen, 1989). Nonetheless, ecological economic theory has come to recognise that the economic system cannot be considered as completely autonomous from the ecosystem it operates in, its laws and restrictions (Carpintero, 2010). Recognising this reality is urgent because, while overexploitation is putting the wellbeing of future generations at risk; pollution and global warming are endangering the survival of our planet as a whole.

The Brundtland report defined sustainable development as a development model that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1989: 15). Acknowledging the historical tie between the welfare state and a specific development model, I believe the principles of sustainable development should also be considered when redefining the Post-industrial Welfare State. In this sense, social citizenship should take a step forward by including this intergenerational commitment: social and economic rights cannot be based on an economic system that does not guarantee these rights for future generations.

Moreover, social and economic rights in developed economies, which are mainly to blame for the current climate crisis, cannot exist at the expense of other countries capacity to guarantee the wellbeing of their citizens. Impoverished and developing countries suffer the consequences of this environmental crisis much more than enriched countries, through resource scarcity, pollution and even extreme weather or desertification (Medialdea and Palazuelos, 2015). Therefore, developed countries must promote a sustainable economic system that no longer relies on extracting natural resources from impoverished countries, but they should also take responsibility for the social and environmental damage they have caused.

In this sense, the Green New Deal proposed by US democratic socialists, such as the Congress Woman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is a step in the right direction. It includes a series of structural economic reforms that combine the struggle against the climate crisis with the search for economic and social justice. The “New Consensus” report, released on February 2019, summarises the Green New Deal as a proposal with “twin ambitions”:

The Green New Deal is “Green” in the sense that its aim is to modernize our economy comprehensively so that we no longer have to poison our environment, subsidize decaying infrastructure, and sacrifice poor and working-class communities to all manner of pollution and environmental degradation, simply to produce wealth that benefits a tiny fraction of Americans.

It is a “New Deal” in the sense that it works on a scale not seen in our country since the New Deal and World War II mobilizations — carefully developed series of historic national projects, conducted on a grand scale, that put scores of millions of Americans back into productive and high-paying jobs, and that transformed our economy into the greatest engine of production and widely shared prosperity that the world had ever known. (Hockett and Gunn-Wright, 2019: 5)

In Europe, many voices have also been raised to promote a similar proposal. In this sense, the Green New Deal for Europe initiative, supported by numerous organisations and researchers, puts forward an ambitious proposal composed of three main axes. First, the program Green Public Works (GPW) that would be a “historic public investment program” (2019: 12) aimed at democratising the economy, promoting workers’ rights and creating decent jobs. Second, an Environmental Union (EnU) that would establish a set of rules to guarantee a just environmental transition. In other words, as with other EU frameworks, it would be “a strategy to bind all EU member states to a system where both gains and burdens of the green transition are shared equitably” (2019: 34). Lastly, an Environmental Justice Commission (EJC) to monitor of the green transition, which includes “exploring mechanisms of accountability for Europe’s historic role in resource extraction in the Global South” (2019: 6).

Ultimately, both proposals aim at creating a new great social consensus to promote a sustainable model of development. This involves structural reforms, such as an ecological transition towards renewable sources of energy or investing in infrastructure and innovations necessary to make industries more sustainable. However, they also argue that these changes must be put forward in a fair way, promoting equity and social justice by creating decent, well-paid and green jobs, especially for those who most suffer the consequences of both neoliberal capitalism and climate change.

A new radical definition of social citizenship must go hand in hand with these types of transformations, with a cross-generational commitment to recover and amplify social and economic rights. However, the “Green New Deal” must also include a series of transformations that go beyond job creation, and that have to do with social security and welfare. As I discussed earlier, future social policies should displace the central role of wage labour in their design, because, in a post-industrial economic order, developed countries can no longer guarantee full employment or labour conditions similar to those of the industrial era.

## Conclusion

A democracy cannot have first and second-class citizens. All people should be granted equal civil, political and social rights, irrespective of class, gender, race, age or even generation. That is why, inequality and social dualisation in the European Union, is an essential element of the democratic crisis we are living.

A radically inclusive democracy, based on the principle of social citizenship, recognises that economic security and equality are essential for citizens to exercise their freedoms and be treated equally. In this sense, contemporary democracies must rely on a welfare system that can assure social and economic rights to all.

In the current context, this means moving away from earnings-based social security systems and means-tested assistance, to promote social policies that guarantee the universal scope of welfare and socially acceptable standards of living to all citizens. For that, wage labour must not be at the centre of social security schemes and social policies should be designed to consider all of the specific forms of social exclusion. In this sense, they must also aim at recognising and redistributing care work, to guarantee full equality and freedom for women. Finally, our democracies must be based on a sustainable model of development and promote an ecological transition to make sure the rights of future generations are also respected.

Ultimately, the XXI century welfare state must not retreat from its essential purpose, but further insist on guaranteeing citizens independence from the market and its logic, de-commodifying labour, welfare, the environment and life as a whole.

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## Google it: Brazil's 2018 election

**Teógenes Moura, Alexandre Gomes, Max Stabile, Marisa von Bülow, Alexandre Gonzales, Alana Karoline Fontenelle Valente, Lorena Vilarins, Beatriz Delgado Val Franco,**<sup>1</sup> Political Science Institute, University of Brasília

**Abstract:** Discussions about the effects of digital technology on democracy have gained the spotlight in recent years. In this article, we analyze an understudied aspect of these effects: the role of search engines in electoral contexts. Our study focuses on the content of Google's search engine results pages (SERP) during the Brazilian 2018 Presidential Election. It is based on an innovative research strategy. We created avatar email accounts intending to represent, as accurately as possible, the digital behavior of a variety of voters. We repeatedly collected the search results of these accounts during the election period, through a standard list of search terms. This operation resulted in a database of more than 235 thousand URL records and over two million words, analyzed according to the source distribution of the URLs shown by Google. Furthermore, we used Word2Vec to review the text contents of each link in the results. The analysis confirms that violent rhetoric characterized the electoral debates. It also shows that search results were concentrated on a small number of online mainstream media sources, while social media links and alternative media sources were less frequent.

**Keywords:** search engine result page, Brazilian elections, digital activism, algorithms, Google.

### Introduction

This article sheds light on an understudied topic in political science: the role of internet search engines as information providers in electoral contexts. One of the critical aspects of the digitalization of political life is the change in the distribution of information. Despite the potential impacts of such change, few scholars have strived to better understand how search engines work and the kind of consequences they hold for political life, especially in electoral contexts (but see Pan *et al.*, 2007; Epstein and Robertson, 2015; Epstein, 2015, 2016; Robertson, 2018).

The present study analyzes search engine results pages (SERP) by Google during a critical event, the Brazilian 2018 Presidential election.<sup>2</sup> Google was the most accessed search engine during the election and is the most accessed website in Brazil (Alexa, 2019). According to a ranking of the 50 most accessed websites in the country, the URLs <google.com> and <google.com.br> hold first and third positions.<sup>3</sup> The second search engine cited, <yahoo.com>, appears only in the eleventh position (*Idem*).

<sup>1</sup> Political Science Institute, University of Brasília, Brazil. This article is the result of an ongoing collective research project, which analyzes the role played by Google in key political events. The authors thank the support of the INCT - Instituto da Democracia e da Democratização da Comunicação, funded by FAPMiG and CAPES-Brazil, as well as of the other members of the research group Resocie (Repensando as Relações Estado-Sociedade - Rethinking State-Society Relations) at the Political Science Institute, University of Brasília, Brazil. We also thank Professor Claudia Melo, from the Computer Science Department, and her Software Engineering class for their support. We are especially grateful to the students involved in developing the code for collecting data from Google: Lincoln Barbosa, Luís Felipe Braga, Arthur Couto, Leonardo Moraes, Guido Oliveira, Ricardo Rachaus e Gabriel Taumaturo. Their work can be accessed in: <<https://github.com/unb-cic-esw/Observatorio-google>>, last Consulted in February 14, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The first round of the Brazilian Presidential election was held on October 7, and the second round on October 28, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The list is available in <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/BR>. last accessed February 1, 2020.



The 2018 election was a disruptive process in Brazilian politics. The elected President, Jair Bolsonaro, is an extreme-right politician and was an underdog candidate until a few months before the voting. The election interrupted a twenty-four year-cycle of electoral dispute between the Workers' Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores) and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB – Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira). As will be argued in the article, the use of digital technologies was particularly relevant in explaining this outcome.

To better understand the role played by Google as an information provider during the electoral process, we have developed an innovative data gathering method. Our first goal is to present this method, its results, and its limitations. We will also submit an analysis of the collected data, considering the information sources given by Google as well as the contents of the texts within the search results' pages. For the content analysis, we applied the Word2Vec algorithm, a Natural Language Processing technique that allowed us to identify patterns of association between key topics concerning the election.

Our research design was organized in three consecutive steps. Firstly, we created fifteen Google accounts, emulating different user profiles. Six of these accounts represented left and right-wing users; the other six were male and female, and the last three were accounts without a search history. We then collected the search results for keywords related to the electoral process made by each logged account, between August 17 and October 28, 2018. This resulted in a database of over 235 thousand URL links. Finally, we accessed the contents of these links, which resulted in a database of approximately 2 million words.

The study shows that the results displayed by Google for our logged accounts were highly concentrated on a small number of online mainstream media sources. At the same time, social media links and alternative media sources were, by comparison, significantly less visible (a partial exception being the case of Wikipedia). The content analysis of the texts within the URLs indicates that violent rhetoric dominated the electoral debates. The results of searches associated with the names of the two candidates that clashed in the second round of the Presidential election showed that words such as "fear" and "aggression" were closely associated with Fernando Haddad, the candidate of the Workers' Party, while "enemy" and "nazi" were linked to Jair Bolsonaro, the candidate of the Social Liberal Party.

This article is divided into four sections. The first offers an introduction to the discussion around search engines and their political impacts. In the second, we discuss the specific context in which our research took place. We also describe the attempts by electoral institutions to regulate mechanisms such as "boosting content" in digital platforms during the electoral process. The third section comprises the results and analysis from our database of search results, obtained through keyword consultation on Google. We then explore the type of media and the contents delivered by Google. Finally, we conclude by describing some of the key challenges faced during our research and by identifying the future possibilities related to this research agenda.

## Search Engines and Politics

According to the Regional Center for Studies for the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br) survey, in 2008, approximately 28% of Brazilian households in rural and urban areas had Internet connection. By 2017, the percentage of Brazilian households with some kind of online connection reached the milestone of 61% (CETIC, 2017: 114). This number, however, may underestimate Internet use and its impacts in the country. After all, people increasingly access the Internet through smartphones, without making a clear distinction whether they are on- or offline.

This phenomenon is especially true if we consider the use of search engine services. As several authors have argued, doing online searches has become naturalized in our daily interactions with electronic devices; thus, contradictorily, the practice ends up being underestimated in its potential to influence access to political information (see, for example, Pan *et al.*, 2007; Epstein and Robertson, 2015). As Hillis *et al.* have put it: “To search has become so natural and obvious a condition of using the Web, and the Web such a natural and obvious feature of the internet, that the specific contingency of these everyday practices has become obscured” (2013: 2).

The logic by which search engines order and present results involves a complicated set of processes. As Google itself explains,<sup>4</sup> five aspects are taken into account when displaying a result. First, the algorithms analyze the meaning of the query by using linguistic models “to understand the type of query you’ve entered, by applying some of the latest research on natural language understanding” (Idem). Then, algorithms look at the correspondence between keywords and websites, checking the relevance of the latter for the research. According to Google, subjective concepts are not considered in the operation:

It is important to note that, while our systems do look for these kinds of quantifiable signals to assess relevance, they are not designed to analyze subjective concepts such as the viewpoint or political leanings of a page’s content.<sup>5</sup>

The next steps are “Ranking useful pages” - the evaluation of a website on a given subject against other sites that provide similar content - and “Usability of the webpages”, that is, deciding whether the settings allow an adequate experience. In other words, this last category determines “whether the site appears correctly in different browsers; whether it is designed for all device types and sizes, including desktops, tablets and smartphones; and whether the page loading times work well for users with slow Internet connections”. Last but not least, algorithms employ users’ information such as country, location, and recent search activity - information which, supposedly, could be controlled and restricted by every user in their privacy settings.

In addition, part of the search results is guided by the company’s logic of selling ad spaces. This advertising service, according to Google, intends to improve the company’s search service by coordinating - through the “sale” of keywords employed in the search – two sets of interests: the user’s, who seek information, and the advertiser’s, who possess information of interest to the user (Vogel and McCaffrey, 2000). Zuboff (2019: 134-138) argues that the search engine’s ad-selling mechanism may also be based on the collection of information from other Google services and products, such as the Android operating system for mobile phones. However, the relationship between the operating system and the search service is not well-known. In Brazil, more than 110 million people have access to the Internet through mobile devices like mobile phones (Belizario, 2018). About 95.4% of them carry the Android operating system, according to a survey by the data analysis company Kantar (2019).

In recent years, some scholars have strived to better understand how search engines work and what their impacts - in political life in general, and elections in particular - are. In 2015, Epstein and Robertson coined the term “search engine manipulation effect” (SEME) to call attention to the possible impacts of search rankings on elections (2015). Based on the results

4 See the documentation available in: <https://www.google.com/search/howsearchworks/algorithms/>, last accessed February 14, 2020. The next two paragraphs rely on this source.

5 *Ibidem*.

of five experiments held in the United States and India, the authors argue that biased search rankings can shift the preferences of undecided voters. Although this research did not employ actual data from search results during elections (but relied on the manipulation of data from experiments), their findings brought attention to the dangerous potential impacts of search engine manipulation. This manipulation may be a subtle one, deriving, for instance, from an alteration in the order in which results appear. Because the majority of users tend to click only on the first three URLs on the first search results' page, the mechanism could have a considerable impact, of which users would not be aware of (*Idem*; see also Granka *et al.*, 2004).

According to Pan *et al* (2007), the preference for first-ranked results can be explained by the trust users place on the criteria used by the company to provide the best information in a quick and efficient manner. The behavior of users (who do not usually question the results obtained) as well as the concentration of traffic in one or two search engines have led scholars to question these companies' lack of transparency and point to their potential misuses. These claims have provoked public reactions from Google representatives on a few occasions. For instance, in 2015 Amitabh Kumar "Amit" Singhal, the then vice president and head of the Google research group,<sup>6</sup> published an op-ed in which he adamantly denied that Google would manipulate search results, calling Epstein's arguments a "flawed elections' conspiracy theory" (2015).

Other studies have pointed to further effects search engines can cause during elections. Also based on data from experiments, Hindman (2009) and Halavais (2009) have expressed concerns at Google's tendency to favor dominant information sources, operating a model in which both Google's search engine and its users "contribute to the selection of more prominent sites, and in turn are more influenced by them" (Halavais, 2009: 59).<sup>7</sup> The present article contributes to the examination of the potential impacts of Google's search results during electoral processes, by proposing a methodology that complements experiment-based studies.

## The Brazilian 2018 Presidential Election

In late 2018, Brazilian voters chose a new President, Vice-President, representatives for the House and two-thirds of the Senate, as well as new State Governors and State legislators. The results of this particular election have been characterized by political scientists as being "disruptive" (e.g., Abranches, 2018: 7; Moura and Corbellini, 2019: 30), because they represented a breach with the organization of political forces and the party system of the previous two and a half decades.

Nothing better illustrates this rupture than the election of the new President, Jair Bolsonaro, candidate of the until then insignificant Partido Social Liberal (Social Liberal Party – PSL). Bolsonaro, formerly a Congressman elected from the state of Rio de Janeiro, won a highly contentious second round dispute against Fernando Haddad, a candidate for the coalition led by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party - PT). The elections' results also showed high turnover rates in the composition of the National Congress, and an increase of the already highly fragmented political party system. We do not aim to scrutinize the complex and multiple

<sup>6</sup> Singhal worked at Google until February 26, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Yet other studies have focused not on what Google offers, but on what users demand from it. Based on data from Google Trends (a tool that provides archived search records which show fluctuations in keyword popularity), Trevisan *et al.* (2018) show that, both in the United States and in the United Kingdom, high-profile mediated events, such as TV debates between Presidential candidates, constitute key drivers of Internet searches during elections.

causes that led to this outcome. It is essential to point out, however, that we cannot understand the disruptive impacts of the 2018 elections without considering the role of digital technologies.

In the 2018 elections, there was a new set of regulations in place, which, together with the increased access to the Internet, helped make digital arenas more relevant than in previous years. For the first time, candidates could lawfully pay for online electoral advertising. The Electoral Courts categorized this practice of advertising through the services of social media platforms as "boosting content" (TSE, 2017: 1) - which consists, under the terms of Resolution 23.551 of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), in "the mechanism or service that, by contracting with Internet application providers, leverage the reach and dissemination of information in order to reach users who would not normally have access to its content"<sup>8</sup> (Idem). In addition to social media platforms, the Electoral Justice included within the definition of payment for "boosting content" (*Ibidem*) that "content resulting from Internet search application [e.x. Google]" (*Ibidem*).

Given such a scenario, Facebook and Google officials signed a memorandum of understanding with the Brazilian Electoral Court in which they agreed to "fight against the misinformation generated by third parties" (TSE, 2018a:1). In addition, the platforms had to meet the requirements of the Brazilian authorities regarding the constitution of publicity mechanisms for the contracts of their services during the electoral process. While Facebook, Instagram, and Google agreed to meet these demands, Twitter decided not to provide advertising services for campaigns because it could not offer the "appropriate tools to facilitate this transparency" (TWITTER, 2018; apud Wakka, 2018:1) required by Brazilian law.

For candidates' electoral strategies, the "boosting content" in Google's search engine was valuable to publicize the campaign's official sites and social media pages, and also to present counter-information about a certain piece of news or attack that a candidate was facing.<sup>9</sup> According to the official data on campaign expenditures (presented by the candidacies), 571 candidates paid Google the total amount of R\$ 6,910,013.86 - approximately US\$ 1.7 million - to "boost content" during the election period (TSE, 2019). They also attempted to influence ranking results and strived to alter the contents by editing websites such as Wikipedia entries.<sup>10</sup>

These efforts are justified by Google's importance as Brazil's most popular search engine. Its relevance can also be assessed in terms of searches related to the 2018 elections. According to data from Google Trends, the names of three Presidential candidates were among the most searched terms that year: "Lula" (former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was barred from running by electoral officials), "Fernando Haddad", and "Jair Bolsonaro". In addition to those, "Elections 2018" was one of the most searched word combinations in that year, along with questions related to the electoral process: "Why vote for Bolsonaro?", "Why not vote for Bolsonaro?", "Lula's Prison" and "Lula's Trial".<sup>11</sup>

8 What the Resolution 23.551 of the TSE defines as "internet application providers", we refer to in this article as a "social media platform".

9 Information obtained through semi-structured interviews, with the social actors involved in local and national campaigns undertaken in Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, between October 2018 and January 2019.

10 Idem.

11 See more in Brazil Google Trends, "Year Research of 2018", in "Search" (Busca), and "News" (Acontecimentos). Available at: <<https://trends.google.com.br/trends/yis/2018/BR/>>

## Interacting with Google

In this section, we present our research design and results.<sup>12</sup> Firstly, we specify the process of creation of Google accounts. Secondly, we show the types of information sources offered as results by Google for the search of terms related to the 2018 elections. We then explain why and how Natural Language Analysis was used to analyze the proximity of words to the search terms. Finally, we compare search results using the names of the two second-round Presidential candidates, “Bolsonaro” and “Haddad”.

### Data Gathering Method

The methodology developed to examine Google’s role as an information provider during the elections consisted of systematically collecting the search results displayed for given keywords to a set of logged accounts, for two and a half months prior to the election. This task was accomplished in two sequential steps. The first consisted in creating fifteen different accounts that simulated different types of Google users. The second was to collect the data on the searches these accounts produced.

The fifteen Google accounts created for this inquiry varied in terms of ideology and gender: “left”, “right”, “woman”, “man” and “neutral”. For each of the four first types, we generated a list of websites and specific search terms, which were used to record a browsing “history”. This “training” process occurred from June 18, 2018 until the end of the Brazilian elections, on October 28 of the same year. The algorithm script for capturing data from searches performed by the created accounts was developed by scraping data from the Google results page. The script was executed with Selenium, a program that automates web browser navigation and is used to emulate users' interaction with Google's search service. The logical procedure that the algorithm performed is depicted in Figure 1.

1. **For each user account:**
  - 1.1. Access <https://accounts.google.com>
  - 1.2. Authenticate with login and password
  - 1.3. **For each keyword:**
    - 1.3.1. Type keyword in search box
    - 1.3.2. Wait for result, take a screenshot and save the page's HTML
  - 1.4. **Logout**

**Figure 1 - Google Data-Capturing Procedure**

Source: the authors’ own elaboration.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed presentation of our research design, see Stabile et al. 2019.

1. **For each URL stored:**
  - 1.1. Retrieve the HTML content of the page
  - 1.3. **For each paragraph tag in the HTML page:**
    - 1.3.1. Extract textual content from <p> tag.
    - 1.3.2. Store data in comma-separated file

**Figure 2 - Textual-Content Capturing**

Source: the authors' own elaboration.

We ran the procedure described in Figure 1 between August 17 and October 28, 2018. It resulted in 10,396 searches and 235,570 URLs. Each one of these URLs provides a link to a specific page, for a specific search query, for each of the 15 accounts created. From this body of URLs, 8,883 were classified as unique. This distinction is vital for us not to gather duplicate content when retrieving textual information from these pages. However, a relevant portion was offline or displayed an error message when we tried to access the address. After cleaning the dataset, we ended up with 5,199 unique URLs. The text collected from these pages (procedure in Figure 2) resulted in 2,734,999 words, of which 160,756 were unique.

**Table 1 - Number of Searches According to Keywords, August 17-October 28, 2018**

| Keywords   | First Round | Second Round | Total |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------|
| <i>Presidential Candidates</i>                     |             |              |       |
| Haddad   | 844         | 75           | 919   |
| Bolsonaro  | 832         | 78           | 910   |
| Lula   | 865         | -            | 865   |
| Alckmin  | 852         | -            | 852   |
| Marina Silva                                       | 829         | -            | 829   |
| Cabo Daciolo                                       | 805         | -            | 805   |
| Ciro Gomes   | 798         | -            | 798   |
| João Amoedo  | 783         | -            | 783   |
| Álvaro Dias  | 726         | -            | 726   |
| Boulos   | 634         | -            | 634   |
| <i>Other keywords</i>                              |             |              |       |
| Candidatos à Presidência (presidential candidates) | 785         | 62           | 847   |
| Lugar de votação (voting place)                    | 662         | 36           | 698   |
| Eleições 2018 (2018 Elections)                     | 613         | 57           | 670   |
| Fraude nas urnas (fraud in voting machines)        | -           | 60           | 60    |

Source: the authors' own elaboration.

Table 1 shows the total number of searches conducted through our Google accounts. The keywords “Haddad”, “Bolsonaro”, “Lula”, Alckmin”, “Marina Silva”, “Cabo Daciolo”, “Ciro Gomes”, “João Amoêdo”, “Álvaro Dias” and “Boulos” all refer to the names of the presidential candidates. The other keywords are neutral terms related to the electoral process, such as “Lugar de votação” (voting place), “Eleições 2018” (2018 Elections), “Candidatos à Presidência” (presidential candidates). We also included searches related to a specific issue that had been a source of contention and false news during the electoral process, that is: “fraude nas urnas” (frauds in electronic voting machines).

## Where does Google take searchers?

The analysis of URLs from the search database shows the sources of information potential voters have access to through the search engine, when typing specific election-related keywords. Tables 2 and 3 present the search results, grouping them according to a typology of media outlets: 1. Traditional or mainstream media - includes established vehicles with large audiences and widespread recognition, present in more than one type of platform (i.e. television channel and website); 2. Blog or editorial page – pages or blogs written by journalists, which may or may not be part of a mainstream vehicle, but do not necessarily share that vehicle’s communication strategy or ideological profile; 3. Social media page - links to social media platforms, such as a Facebook page or Twitter account; 4. Page or blog associated with political parties - channels linked to official political party media and their supporters; 5. Wikipedia - includes all the URLs from the collaborative research platform; and 6. Public portals - includes links to public administration websites, such as the House of Representatives, the Senate, electoral officials, among others (Valente and Franco, 2019).

As shown in Table 2, result distribution privileged mainstream online outlets. In total, a little over half of the links (51.4%) lead to traditional, established national media outlets – such as G1 (13.8%), Veja (8.1%), Estadão (5.7%), Folha de São Paulo (5.4%), UOL (5.1%), El País (2.8%), Exame (2.7%), BBC (2.5%), Gazeta do Povo (1.7%), O Globo (1%), Terra (1%), Carta Capital (0.8%) and IstoÉ (0.8%). Wikipedia, a collaborative research platform, was the third most common URL. Social media platforms - Facebook (4%), Twitter (2.6%) and YouTube (1.6%) - concentrated 8.2% of the results, and the website from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), 1.3%.

The results show that, at least in the case of the accounts we created in the context of the Brazilian 2018 elections, Google tended to direct users to established, mainstream media outlets for information on election-related searches. This is perhaps not surprising, given that these outlets are owned by corporations that possess the resources allowing them to be better positioned in search engine rankings - like Search Engine Optimization (SEO) experts, for example. Perhaps more striking is the fact that, as Table 2 shows, distribution is highly concentrated in only a few of these outlets. The most common domains were those associated with two media vehicles, G1 and Veja.<sup>13</sup> Together, they concentrated almost 22% of all URLs displayed in our database. These findings confirm the experiment-data on Google results (Hindman, 2009; Halavais, 2009). On the one hand, it may be seen as a positive result, given the absence of the plethora of alternative media outlets created during the election, many of which channelled misinformation campaigns (Hindman, 2009; Halavais, 2009). On the other hand, the result echoes some recent concerns by researchers around the fact that search engines favor dominant information sources, and do not present a plurality of opinions and perspectives. As said by Hindman, “some sites consistently rise to the top of Yahoo!’s and Google’s search results; some sites never get indexed by search engines at all.” (Hindman, 2009:15).

<sup>13</sup> G1 is a daily online news portal owned by the largest national media corporation, Rede Globo (g1.globo.com), and Veja is a weekly printed and online magazine owned by the communication group Abril (veja.abril.com.br).



**Table 2 - Most Frequent Domains in the Search Results Database, grouped by Media Type**

| Domain         | Type of Domain            | N       | %    | % acum. |
|----------------|---------------------------|---------|------|---------|
| G1             | Mainstream Media          | 30,107  | 13,8 | 13,8    |
| Veja           | Mainstream Media          | 17,787  | 8,1  | 21,9    |
| Wikipedia      | Wikipedia                 | 16,193  | 7,4  | 29,3    |
| Estadão        | Mainstream Media          | 12,490  | 5,7  | 35,0    |
| Folha          | Mainstream Media          | 11,704  | 5,4  | 40,4    |
| Uol            | Mainstream Media          | 11,213  | 5,1  | 45,5    |
| Facebook       | Social Media Page         | 8,726   | 4,0  | 49,5    |
| ElPaís         | Mainstream Media          | 6,159   | 2,8  | 52,3    |
| Exame          | Mainstream Media          | 5,995   | 2,7  | 55,0    |
| Infomoney      | Mainstream Media          | 5,568   | 2,5  | 57,6    |
| BBC            | Mainstream Media          | 5,399   | 2,5  | 60,1    |
| Brasil247      | Blog or journalistic page | 4,970   | 2,3  | 62,3    |
| Twitter        | Social Media Page         | 4,474   | 2,0  | 64,4    |
| Gazeta do Povo | Mainstream Media          | 3,812   | 1,7  | 66,1    |
| EM             | Mainstream Media          | 3,573   | 1,6  | 67,8    |
| Youtube        | Social Media Page         | 3,448   | 1,6  | 69,3    |
| Esmael Morais  | Blog or journalistic page | 3,038   | 1,4  | 70,7    |
| TSE            | Public Portal             | 2,741   | 1,3  | 72,0    |
| Poder360       | Mainstream Media          | 2,431   | 1,1  | 73,1    |
| O Globo        | Mainstream Media          | 2,233   | 1,0  | 74,1    |
| Terra          | Mainstream Media          | 2,219   | 1,0  | 75,1    |
| Revista Forum  | Blog or journalistic page | 2,168   | 1,0  | 76,1    |
| Catraca Livre  | Blog or journalistic page | 2,155   | 1,0  | 77,1    |
| IstoÉ          | Mainstream Media          | 1,753   | 0,8  | 77,9    |
| Carta Capital  | Mainstream Media          | 1,653   | 0,8  | 78,7    |
| Other          | -                         | 46,674  | 21   | 100,0   |
| Total          |                           | 218,683 | 100  | -       |

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Mainstream media outlets are the most frequent URLs for all of the logged accounts and do not show any significant variation in accordance to either ideology or gender (see Table 3).<sup>14</sup> However, the extent to which this type of media appears for each search term varied. The ratio of mainstream media and other media types reached 86% for searches of the term "Presidential candidates". In comparison, when searches included the names of the candidates, the results generated a greater plurality of sources, regardless of the accounts' ideological profiles. The search for the names of the two candidates who would reach the second round of the election - Jair Bolsonaro and Fernando Haddad - led to mainstream media outlet sources in approximately 62.7% and 60.6% of cases, respectively.

The second most frequent type of media varies. For seven of the ten potential candidates in the first round of the electoral process, blogs and journalistic pages appear among the top resulting sources of information. For two of these candidates, social media pages like Facebook or Twitter were the second most relevant types. In the case of Jair Bolsonaro, social media pages were as recurrent as editorial pages. In the case of Marina Silva (candidate of the Sustainability Network Party), the second most frequent type of media was the collaborative encyclopedia site, Wikipedia.

As shown in Table 3, both pages or blogs associated with political parties and public portals were less frequent among the search results on the platform. Consistently, public portals were relevant for searches including the term "voting place" (74.3%); they were the second most frequent when searching for "Elections 2018" and "Presidential candidates" (10.9 and 7%, respectively).

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this data, see Valente and Franco, 2019.

**Table 3 - Average Prevalence of Types of Media Domain, by Search Keyword (%)**

| <b>Search Keywords (names of candidates and four key topics related to the election)</b> | <b>Mainstream Media</b> | <b>Journalistic Blogs and Pages</b> | <b>Social Media Pages</b> | <b>Wikipedia</b> | <b>Pages or Blogs linked to Political Parties</b> | <b>Public Domains</b> | <b>Others</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------|
| Alckimin   | 67,0                    | 10,0                                | 5,0                       | 9,0              | 4,0   | --                    | 5,0           |
| Álvaro Dias  | 57,0                    | 16,0                                | 10,0                      | 8,0              | --  | 7,0                   | 2,0           |
| Boulos   | 58,4                    | 20,8                                | 7,9                       | 9,9              | 1,0   | --                    | 2,0           |
| Bolsonaro  | 62,7                    | 8,8                                 | 8,8                       | 7,8              | 5,9   | --                    | 5,9           |
| Cabo Daciolo   | 56,0                    | 13,0                                | 9,0                       | 10,0             | --  | 7,0                   | 5,0           |
| Ciro Gomes   | 69,0                    | 8,0                                 | 11,0                      | 8,0              | 2,0   | --                    | 2,0           |
| Haddad   | 60,6                    | 19,2                                | 7,1                       | 7,1              | --  | --                    | 6,1           |
| João Amoedo  | 54,0                    | 8,0                                 | 14,0                      | 8,0              | 7,0   | 1,0                   | 8,0           |
| Lula   | 56,6                    | 16,2                                | 9,1                       | 10,1             | 6,1   | --                    | 2,0           |
| Marina Silva   | 68,0                    | 7,0                                 | 8,0                       | 9,0              | 6,0   | --                    | 2,0           |
| Candidatos Presidência (Presidential Candidates)   | 86,0                    | 5,0                                 | --                        | --               | --  | 7,0                   | 2,0           |
| Eleições 2018 (2018 Elections)   | 75,2                    | 8,9                                 | 3,0                       | --               | --  | 10,9                  | 2,0           |
| Fraude nas urnas (fraud in voting machines)  | 76,8                    | 13,1                                | 8,1                       | --               | --  | --                    | 2,0           |
| Lugar de votação (voting place)  | 23,8                    | 1,0                                 | --                        | --               | --  | 74,3                  | 1,0           |

Source: authors' own elaboration.

## The Proximity of Terms in Google Searches

To better understand the contents of the information Google displayed for its users during the election period, it is important to go beyond an analysis of the distribution of links per type of media outlet, to examine the URL content itself. In order to do so, we generated a second dataset: we visited each unique URL in the dataset discussed in previous sections and saved their textual content to a key-value database. This step generated a text body of approximately 2 million words. We used the Word2Vec algorithm to understand which terms were closest to the key players in the second round of the Presidential election - Jair Bolsonaro, and Fernando Haddad.

## Introduction to Natural Language Processing and Word2Vec

One of the most fundamental characteristics of any human society is the language its members use to communicate with one another, seen as it has the potential to show a community's inner societal structure. Analyzing language is, nonetheless, a challenging task: aspects such as grammar, semantic structures and subjective aspects like irony represent key sources of difficulty. However, recent developments in cloud computing and big data led to the development of Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools and techniques, which allow us to work with extensive sets of data. The uses of NLP techniques are manifold; from sentiment analysis to automated translation between languages, they allow us to transform audio into text and vice-versa, parts-of-speech tagging, among others.

In order to explore the texts in our content database, we used a specific NLP algorithm, Word2Vec, which allows us to build proximity relationships among words by considering their context. The concept of " $n$ -grams" enables us to go beyond simply counting words, and is one of the fundamental ideas behind Word2Vec. An  $n$ -gram is a set of words which are likely to occur together in a body of text, where  $n$  is the number of words. For instance: "like a baby" is a 3-gram. Furthermore, the Word2Vec algorithm considers the circumstances in which a word or sentence occurs in a body of text, by determining the distance between these words or  $n$ -grams in relation to the entire piece of writing. This, in turn, enables us to better understand the semantics of a language than we would be able to do by relying only on frequency analysis, for example.

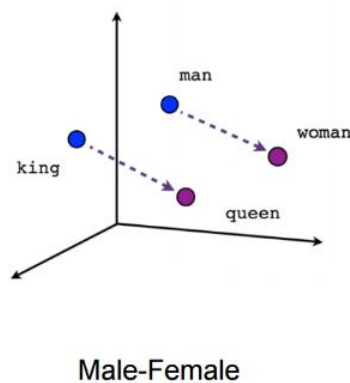
Word2Vec is described in its original presentation to the scientific community as an algorithm which "presents two new model architectures for learning distributed representations of words that try to minimize computational complexity" (Mikolov *et al.*, 2013: 4): The *Continuous Bag-of-Words Model* and the *Continuous Skip-gram Model*. Both these models minimize computational complexity by improving upon the shared point of failure found in other proposals - the non-linear hidden layer. A neural network is able to learn both linear and non-linear functions, such that its learning is based on the amount of training it receives and on the neural network itself. The non-linear layer can be considered as an element that allows a neural network to learn non-linear functions. They are very powerful, but also very consuming in terms of computing power, such that we might be able to perform with higher efficiency by using simpler models.

This is where both architectural models gain the spotlight. The Continuous Bag-of-Words Model allows for a projection layer which is shared for all words, instead of a hidden non-linear layer, which means that all words will be projected to a single position while having their weights averaged - so that the order of appearance of a word in a text does not influence its impact when evaluating other words, but only the context in which it appears. The Continuous

Skip-gram Model goes somehow in the opposite direction: it works in a more focused manner, by trying to predict the context through a target word, instead of trying to predict the word based on the context. The result of running these models against a body of text generates word embeddings, that is, vector representations of the relationship between words in a body of text in a matrix-type space. Thus, if a word tends to appear in a certain context that is similar to another word appearing in the same setting, they will have proximate word embeddings – meaning that they are closer to each other in an  $N$ -dimensional space. The following example illustrates this.

If we consider the phrase "It is a beautiful day in Chicago" and the sentence 'It is a beautiful day in New York', the Word2Vec algorithm will understand Chicago and New York as being closely related, since they appear in very proximate contexts. Therefore, the word embeddings for both will be similar, and the distance between the vectors that represent both words will be, in turn, short. This point leads us to one of the most impressive features in Word2Vec: it allows us to perform mathematical operations such as addition, subtraction, sine, and cosine between words as if they were numbers. This feature led to the already classic Word2Vec example for the English language:

**King - Man + Woman = Queen**



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**Figure 3 - Word2Vec example**

Source: the authors' own elaboration.

The ability to operate upon words as if they were vectors in a  $N$ -dimensional space allows us to understand subjective aspects of a given language (assuming that we dispose of a large enough dataset). These were computationally imperceptible features prior to Word2Vec. The sheer analysis of  $n$ -grams will give hints as to the direction in which a specific language works, but Word2Vec is powerful enough to let us understand the nuances that reflect how a given society is organized in a much more subjective manner.

## Applying Word2Vec to the Content Dataset

Before we delve into the Word2Vec analysis of our dataset, we will outline the procedure used to acquire the data for our study. First, we built a scraper for the pages listed, which visited and searched for paragraph elements on each page. When it found one of these, we downloaded its content to a new dataset containing the visited URL and its textual content. Since we considered this mechanism, heuristically, to be quite fragile - page owners could store text in different HTML tags, or change the structure of the page while we were scraping - we manually visited the 15 most recurrent unique domain names in Google's results and made sure they were storing their content in a way that we could access and download. Since they represented approximately 65% of all results (as shown in the previous section), we believe we were able to build a representative database of textual content, consisting of approximately 2 million words.

| result_type | result_positi | result_url  | result_title                                     |
|-------------|---------------|---|--|
| noticia     | 1             | https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2018/noticia   | Bolsonaro diz que vai tirar Brasil da ONU se for |
| noticia     | 2             | https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/celso-rocha     | Marina contra Bolsonaro - 20/08/2018 - Celso R   |
| noticia     | 3             | https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/08/18/politica, | VitÃ³ria de Bolsonaro pode tirar investimentos i |
| noticia     | 4             | https://www.poder360.com.br/eleicoes/alckmin-ter      | Alckmin terÃ¡ 11 minutos diÃ¡rios na TV e Bolso  |
| noticia     | 5             | https://veja.abril.com.br/blog/noblat/tem-cheiro-ou   | Tem cheiro (ou mau cheiro) de Bolsonaro no ar    |
| noticia     | 6             | http://www3.redetv.uol.com.br/blog/reinaldo/bolsc     | Bolsonaro prova: Trump nÃ£o Ã© de nada; mo       |

Figure 4 - Sample of Data Collected, by Type of Result, URL Address, and Result Title

Source: author's own elaboration.

Then we proceeded to run the Word2Vec algorithm on our new database. We used the following algorithm to do so:

---

**Algorithm** Applies Word2Vec to a corpus of text

---

```

1: procedure WORD2VEC
2:   bodyOfText ← loadBodyText().lower().removeAccents().applyIramuteqFilter()
3:   wordTokens ← nltk.word_tokenize(bodyOfText, language = "portuguese")
4:   word2vec_holder ← Word2Vec(wordTokens, size = 10, min_count = 2)
5:   word2vec_holder.train(wordTokens, total_examples = len(wordTokens), epochs = epochs)
6:   print(word2vec_holder.wv.most_similar('some_query_term', topn = 50))

```

---

Figure 5 – Word2Vec Algorithm Applied to the Database

Source: Moura, 2019.

## Nazi, incompetent, authoritarian, rapist: the language of a disruptive election

For this article, we have scrutinized word proximity in the textual contents of search results for the names of the two most relevant Presidential candidates: Bolsonaro (Jair Bolsonaro) and Haddad (Fernando Haddad). We see both negative and positive words associated with the two candidates. Thus, "nazista" (nazi) and "autoritarismo" (authoritarianism) are linked to Bolsonaro, whereas "incompetente" (incompetent) and "corruptor" (which comes from the word "corrupt") are associated with Haddad. At the same time, Bolsonaro is found near to the term "pragmatismo" (to be pragmatic, a trait which the candidate supposedly possessed, according to his supporters), while Haddad crops up close to "escolarizar" (a word related to schools and education - which might be explained by the fact that Haddad has been an academic for 35 years and is a former Ministry of Education).

Other proximities among words provide further insights into the election. "Louvor" (to pray) is associated with Bolsonaro, revealing the relevance of the candidate's alliance with Evangelical Churches (whose members are expected to compose the majority of the Brazilian population by 2032<sup>16</sup>). To explore the religious influence further, we looked for a term that would serve as a counterpart to Bolsonaro's "louvor"; our finding is that Bolsonaro is to "louvor" as Haddad is to "aula" (class), which fits in quite well with the reality of the electoral process. In fact, while Bolsonaro received major support from aforementioned evangelical churches, Haddad was most popular among university students. This relationship can also be expressed in this equation:

**Haddad + Bolsonaro - *louvor* = *aula***

16 For further discussion, see <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/78-noticias/585245-transicao-religiosa-catolicos-abaixo-de-50-ate-2022-e-abaixo-do-percentual-de-evangelicos-ate-2032>, last accessed October 13th, 2019.

**Table 4 - Words Most Proximate to “Bolsonaro” and “Haddad” (all counts)**

| Words Proximate to “Bolsonaro” |                  |             | “Words proximate to “Haddad” |               |             |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------|------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Word                           |                  | Coefficient | Word                         |               | Coefficient |
| descumprir                     | disobey          | 0,9965      | incompetente                 | incompetent   | 0,9829      |
| capaz                          | capable          | 0,9935      | doleiro                      | money changer | 0,9813      |
| solidarizar                    | sympathize       | 0,9902      | ideologia                    | ideology      | 0,9773      |
| inimigo                        | enemy            | 0,9768      | Correios                     | Correios      | 0,9769      |
| Dirceu                         | Dirceu           | 0,9737      | hebraico                     | hebrew        | 0,9758      |
| Kim                            | Kim              | 0,9618      | alencar                      | alencar       | 0,9449      |
| mente                          | lies             | 0,9257      | maluf                        | maluf         | 0,9310      |
| pragmatismo                    | pragmatism       | 0,9217      | escolarizar                  | school        | 0,9265      |
| indenizar                      | indemnify        | 0,9182      | Doria                        | Doria         | 0,9257      |
| nazista                        | Nazi             | 0,9169      | corrupto                     | corrupt       | 0,9225      |
| rato                           | rat              | 0,9145      | enriquecer                   | enrich        | 0,9220      |
| museu                          | museum           | 0,9032      | Buarque                      | Buarque       | 0,9192      |
| gadelha                        | gadelha          | 0,9019      | Estuprador                   | Rapist        | 0,9115      |
| rouco                          | hoarse           | 0,9007      | Diesel                       | Diesel        | 0,9087      |
| autoritarismo                  | authoritarianism | 0,8991      | prepotente                   | boastful      | 0,9086      |
| desequilibrado                 | unbalanced       | 0,8966      | disperso                     | scattered     | 0,9074      |

Source: Moura 2019.

The words "gay" and "ideologia" (ideology), which appear proximate to “Haddad”, refer to another polarizing issue in the election. While the first one displays the (positive) link between the LGBT community with the leftist candidate, the second might be related to an expression made famous by those who oppose LGBT rights, that is, "ideologia de gênero" (gender ideology). While further research is needed to verify this claim, Haddad openly declared his support for minorities, and as such was criticized by his opponents.

Another contentious issue during the election is also clearly stated by the words most related to both candidates: corruption. Haddad's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Workers' Party) has been a target of investigation for connection with major fraudulent schemes for years, an inquiry which recently resulted in the arrest of former President and PT leader, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.<sup>17</sup> These incidents affected Haddads' campaign, as one can note in some of the words found associated with him: "doleiro" (a person who exchanges foreign currency, often illegally), "corruptor", "enriquecer" (to get rich, which is fair to assume has a negative

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/brasil/politica/liberdade-prisao-domiciliar-ou-continuar-na-cadeia-os-possiveis-desfechos-do-novo-julgamento-de-lula,3d704f91980c2c339023ed17b6d7effad4kn98b.html>, last access on October 13th, 2019.



meaning), "preso" (to be locked up) and "Maluf" (a Brazilian politician, famous for being on the INTERPOL list for his crimes of corruption). Finally, although the term does not appear on our list, it is important to remember that the operation Car Wash - one of the major anti-corruption investigations ever carried by Brazilian authorities - was effectively active during the campaign, and might have had an influence on the corruption-related words seen on our list.

Further analysis was undertaken to understand whether the results varied according to the ideological profile of the Google accounts created for the research, that is, left-wing and right-wing users (see Tables 5 and 6).

**Table 5 - Proximity of words to “Bolsonaro” and “Haddad” (left-wing accounts)**

| Words Proximate to “Bolsonaro” |             |             | Words proximate to “Haddad” |               |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Word                           |             | Coefficient | Word                        |               | Coefficient |
| projeto                        | project     | 0,9054      | levantar                    | to rise       | 0,9681      |
| jobim                          | jobim       | 0,8635      | covarde                     | coward        | 0,9680      |
| ironizar                       | irony       | 0,8536      | receio                      | fear          | 0,9613      |
| manipular                      | manipulate  | 0,8408      | disseminar                  | disseminate   | 0,9549      |
| teatro                         | theater     | 0,8380      | boneco                      | doll          | 0,9529      |
| telejornal                     | newscast    | 0,8316      | propriedade                 | property      | 0,9327      |
| homenagear                     | to honor    | 0,8174      | aliar                       | to ally       | 0,9197      |
| progresso                      | progress    | 0,8155      | despudor                    | shameless     | 0,9185      |
| mole                           | soft        | 0,7827      | obra                        | constructions | 0,9178      |
| correio                        | post office | 0,7787      | protesto                    | protests      | 0,9039      |
| indicar                        | to indict   | 0,7760      | ministerial                 | ministerial   | 0,8894      |

Source: Database of the Research Google Results: Brazilian General Election 2018, Resocie, 2018.

**Table 6 - Proximity of words to “Bolsonaro” and “Haddad” (right-wing accounts)**

| Words Proximate to “Bolsonaro” |                  |             | “Words proximate to “Haddad” |            |             |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------|------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Word                           |                  | Coefficient | Word                         |            | Coefficient |
| presidenciável                 | presidential     | 0,9997      | tranquilao                   | too calm   | 0,9869      |
| odebrecht                      | odebrecht        | 0,9989      | ironia                       | irony      | 0,9606      |
| processo                       | trial            | 0,9988      | Hitler                       | Hitler     | 0,9568      |
| unir                           | to unite         | 0,9984      | hipocrisia                   | hipocrisy  | 0,9329      |
| privatizar                     | to privatize     | 0,8663      | mamar                        | mamar*     | 0,8936      |
| caos                           | chaos            | 0,8695      | ensino                       | teaching   | 0,8795      |
| mito                           | legend           | 0,8652      | saneamento                   | sanitation | 0,8717      |
| desenvolvimentista             | developmentalist | 0,8203      | renovar                      | renew      | 0,8519      |
|                                |                  |             | assertivo                    | assertive  | 0,8424      |

\* “Mamar” means “breastfeeding”, but, in a rough translation, it might be better translated to 'suckle', since it consists of a negative characterization of the relationship that a political person has with the public office he/she holds, aiming at private benefit only.

Source: Database of the Research Google Results: Brazilian General Election 2018, Resocie, 2018.

As we can see in Tables 5 and 6, the URL contents received by right-wing and left-wing accounts show that antagonism characterized both sides of the discussion. For left-wing voters, the terms associated with Bolsonaro indicate, in general, a discussion around the opposing candidate’s weaker characteristics, exemplified by the wording "ironizar" (to ironize) and "manipular" (to manipulate). The word "telejornal" (to appear in a news programme tv show), in turn, is probably a reference to Bolsonaro’s participation in the country’s most watched news programme, *Jornal Nacional*, which generated strong reactions, especially for his mentioning of the dictatorship period the country had been through (from 1964 to 1985<sup>18</sup>). The word "homenagear" (to honor) is most likely a reference to his broaching the well-known case of Carlos Brilhante Ustra, a former military officer accused of crimes of torture during the dictatorship.

As for Haddad, however, the terms associated with the candidate for left-wing accounts are, surprisingly, not necessarily supportive. "Covarde" (coward) and "despudor" (shameless) are a few examples; they open up a potential discussion on the possibilities as to why such words appear in association to with him in the textual content seen by his supporters,<sup>19</sup> when following Google's results.

The content analysis of the right-wing accounts’ URL results shows that they were more supportive of Bolsonaro. Words such as "presidenciável" (presidential), "mito" (legend, an expression used by Bolsonaro's supporters in order to praise their candidate) and

<sup>18</sup> See <https://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2018/08/28/jair-bolsonaro-psl-e-entrevistado-no-jornal-nacional.ghtml>, access on October 13th, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Left wings avatars accounts.

"desenvolvimentista" (developmentalist) all suggest a favourable attitude towards the candidate. There are also words that raise some doubt, such as "caos" (chaos) and "petismo" (a word related to the Workers' Party). Previous research suggests<sup>20</sup> that one of the main topics of discussion for Bolsonaro's supporters was the opposing party. Another word that catches the eye is "algoritmo" (algorithm) - in fact, Bolsonaro is accused of having used both automated social media posting<sup>21</sup> and Whatsapp bots in order to support his presidential campaign.<sup>22</sup> Such themes are strongly associated to the worldwide discussions on the subject of misinformation and its effects on democracies.

Concurrently, for the right-wing accounts, words associated with "Haddad" continually frame the candidate under an unfavourable light - "Ironia" (Irony), "Hitler", "Hipocrisia" (hypocrisy), and "mamar" (which can be loosely translated as "to suckle" in English; in this case, it indicates a pejorative connotation of the corrupt practices undertaken during the Workers' Party administrations). Potentially positive terms appear in this list as well, such as "Ensino" (to teach), "Saneamento" (sanitary), "renovar" (to renovate) and "assertivo" (to be assertive). Further research is necessary, however, to determine if these terms are associated with "Haddad" in a favorable or, instead, negative/ironic manner.

It is also important to keep in mind this research's limitations. Firstly, the Word2Vec algorithm possesses an inherent degree of uncertainty: in fact, two different people, running the same algorithm<sup>23</sup> on the same dataset, might see two different results. This is to be expected, and does not necessarily represent a programming error or a human mistake but speaks to the intrinsic nature of the algorithm itself. As mentioned earlier, the N-gram Neural Network Language Model (N-gram NNLM)<sup>24</sup> does not try to depict the original data with perfect accuracy when transforming words in the text to mathematical vectors - a process which leads to varying results when different users run the algorithm through the same dataset. Again, this is not necessarily a sign of error, for the algorithm's operative mode is not wholly deterministic, and allows for a certain amount of randomness to occur. In addition, the algorithm expects to manage enormous amounts of data. Although we have collected a significant dataset, of about 2 million words, the smallest dataset used as an example in the original paper describing Word2Vec (Mikolov et al., 2013: 4) contains approximately 24 million records. This is a considerable difference, and it certainly affects our survey's effectiveness and precision.

## Conclusion

Google acts as a bridge between internet users and information sources, a kind of *gatekeeper among gatekeepers*. Despite its relevance, its role remains understudied in a field that has tended to privilege the analysis of other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. This article consists in an initial effort of developing of a novel method to analyze internet search engines, aiming to appraise their effects on information provision during political events.

20 See <https://institudademocra.wixsite.com/meusite/feed-de-posts/o-debate-sobre-a-seguran%C3%A7a-da-urna-eletronica-brasileira-no-youtube>, access on October 17th, 2019.

21 See <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/12/apos-eleicao-perfis-falsos-e-robos-pro-bolsonaro-continua-ativos-aponta-estudo.shtml>, access on October 13th, 2019.

22 See <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/estudo-aponta-para-automacao-no-envio-de-mensagens-e-orquestracao-entre-grupos-de-whatsapp-pro-bolsonaro.shtml>, access on October 13th 2019.

23 Which is open-source and available online at <https://github.com/teogenesmoura/pesquisaGoogle>

24 A good discussion around N-gram NNLMs can be found here: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1708.07252>

The examination of search results pages shows that Google overwhelmingly tended to direct our logged accounts to mainstream media outlets, in the months leading to and in the duration of the Brazilian 2018 elections. More interestingly, results were highly concentrated in only a handful of these outlets. On the one hand, this can be considered as a positive outcome, given the absence of the plethora of new alternative media outlets - many of which were created during the election to channel misinformation campaigns. On the other hand, it echoes recent researchers' concerns that search engines favor dominant information sources, and do not present a relevant plurality of opinions.

To better understand the kind of information Google users access, we also did a content analysis of the texts stemming from the search results links for each of our logged accounts. The investigation (of approximately 2 million words) portrayed an electoral process characterized by a narrative of violent polarization, where there is no clear space for dialogue among the various parties involved.

Besides, content analysis indicates that the search engine gives out different results to users coming from contrasting political leanings. This finding is relevant, considering that other studies had not encountered significant differences in Google search results among users with divergent access habits (*apud* Hannak *et al.*, 2013). Future studies should take a closer look into the potential effects of restricted information access according to ideology, based not only on the type of media that appears on the search results, but also on the contents of the texts within the links.

Several obstacles were encountered when systematically gathering search results pages over a period of many weeks. As a result of such limitations, we have decided to invest in a robust computational infrastructure for future projects, in order to gather data and run analyses. We also need to conduct further research to better understand the effects that the "training" of our ideological personas had on the results provided by Google. Finally, we also intend to apply more efficient computational techniques, better adapted to small datasets such as our own.

Despite these difficulties, the present study represents an important achievement. Throughout the paper, we have indicated that it is possible and desirable to develop techniques for the analysis of search engines' potential effects during democratic elections. As we see it, building knowledge within this research field may boost interest and encourage new studies. Furthermore, it is vital to situate our analysis in the context of the Brazilian 2018 electoral period. Research results are representative of this time frame, but may not be so in the future, given the search algorithms' intrinsically dynamic characteristics. Future studies will thus need to consider the difficulties of looking at the structural changes in Google's search engine. The lack of transparency in how search engines decide which information present to whom, and in which order, represents a constant challenge for the comprehension of Google's political impacts.

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# The crisis of liberal democracy and New Technologies: A case study of the Free Brazil Movement

**Pedro Abelin,**<sup>1</sup> Political Science Institute, University of Brasília

**Abstract:** The New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have reshaped the debates about populism and the crisis of democracy. This article seeks to analyze how the use of social media reinvigorates the mobilization ability of outsiders to challenge establishment actors and question the political order. It builds a connection between the scholarly research exploring the implications of the use of technology for political activism and for democracy. It also discusses the theoretical reflections on the challenges in bypassing political gatekeepers. The paper analyzes how ICTs promote the rise of a populist logic in political conversations. More specifically, it analyzes how the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) conceptualizes political parties and justifies its relation to them, through arguments of both denial and necessity. Data sources are the MBL's publications on its Facebook page (2014-2017), as well as the debate on political parties appearing in the MBL forum on Reddit.

**Keywords:** crisis of democracy, populism, New Information and Communication Technologies, political parties, digital activism.

## Introduction

The crisis of democracy is a seminal object of academic debate (Crozier *et al.*, 1975; Habermas, 1975; Offe, 1994; Poulantzas and Balibar, 1981; De Tocqueville, 1982). It has recently gained a central place on the agenda (eg. Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2018), particularly due to the rise of authoritarian and populist regimes and movements around the world.

The present article builds on the recent debates on the relationships between the crisis of liberal democracy, the crisis of capitalism, and the rise of populism. As scholars such as Rodrik (2017) and Gerbaudo (2013) have argued, populism is best understood as a symptom of systemic failure, rather than its cause. This article argues for the need of an analysis that goes beyond the local causes of national crisis in order to understand the rise of populist movements and actors as a systemic problem of global capitalism.

More specifically, this paper focuses on the connection between the uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and populist actors. This relationship has been the subject of several studies that analyze how different uses of technology have impacted political communication (e.g. Allcott; Gentzkow, 2017; Bastos and Mercea, 2018, Bessi; Ferrara, 2016;

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<sup>1</sup> Pedro Abelin is a Master Student at the Political Science Institute of the University of Brasília (IPOL- UnB) and a member of the Rethinking Society State Relations research group – Resocie (University of Brasília). He is a CAPES (Cordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) scholarship recipient at the Institute for Democracy and Democratization of Communication – INCT. E-mail: pedroabelin@gmail.com. An earlier version of this article was presented at the International Workshop “The Crisis and the Challenges of Democracy”, held at the Centro de Estudos Sociais, at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, on November 4-6, 2019. I am grateful for the suggestions and comments of Marisa von Bülow, Danniell Gobbi, Vinicius Januzzi, Victor Varella and Priscila Carvalho to this article's previous versions. I also appreciate the comments of the article's anonymous reviewer. This work was supported by INCT – Instituto da Democracia e da Democratização da Comunicação - Institute for Democracy and the Democratization of Communication. I also thank Tayrine Dias and Danniell Gobbi for making the Facebook publications database available.

Pariser, 2011; Shao *et al.*, 2017). I am especially interested in the theoretical debates about the potential democratic impacts of ICT use in bypassing traditional gatekeepers, most importantly among political parties. In this sense, I accept the interpretation of Shoemaker and Vos (2009), who define gatekeeping as:

[...] the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day [...] people rely on mediators to transform information about billions of events into a manageable subset of media messages. (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009: 1)

This article presents a codification strategy of social media texts that allows us to understand how populist actors relate to political parties. I analyze how the right-wing civil society organization *Free Brazil Movement* (Movimento Brasil Livre or MBL) conceptualizes the institution of the political party and justifies its relationship with existing ones. The analysis is based on MBL's publications on their Facebook Page between 2014 and 2017 and on the debates appearing in the MBL forum on Reddit on the subject of political parties' validity as institutions.

The MBL, one of the most important Brazilian right-wing civil society organizations, was chosen for this case study for its standing as an organization that questions the political establishment and that has been characterized by certain authors as typically populist (Ortellado *et al.*, 2017). The Movement has been a protagonist of political disputes prevailing in Brazil since the June 2013<sup>2</sup> demonstrations. The MBL has used ICTs intensively and effectively to further enhance its power of action and mobilization (Machado, 2017: 48). This may confirm what Gerbaudo (2018) has argued, that is, that populist organizations, in general, have a great understanding of social media's mode of operation and thus of how to employ them for their needs. Furthermore, the analysis of how the MBL has interacted with political parties will highlight key aspects of the contemporary crisis of liberal democracies. Finally, this case sheds light on the increasing relevance of populism for the global South.

The article is organized into seven sections. In the first three sections of the text, I present a review of some different conceptual approaches to populism, as well as of the debate about the relationship between the rise of populist actors and the crisis of liberal democracy. In the following two sections, I discuss the methodological approach proposed in the paper. In the sixth, I present a content analysis of MBL's social media publications. Finally, I end the article with brief considerations on my argument.

## What is populism?

Many political analysts and academics have analyzed the connection between the crisis of democracy and the rise of populism (e.g. Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2013). In fact, populism has become a central topic on the agendas of both mass media and academia. As Abelin and Gobbi (2019) argue, the recent literature on populism has contributed to a move beyond the negative connotation with which the concept has historically been associated to (Canovan, 1999; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Still, many critics of populism as a concept give it a derogatory meaning by arguing that the term is vague and indeterminate to the audience it addresses, unclear as to its discourse and its political postulates (Laclau, 2005: 67).

2 The June 2013 protests, known as "Jornadas de Junho", were a series of political demonstrations that took place in Brazil. The protests began in reaction to the increase in bus fares in São Paulo, but spread throughout the country with extremely diverse agendas, disputed by the right and the left. For further understanding, we recommend the reading *Cidades rebeldes: Passe Livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo: Carta Maior, 2013.



Laclau replies that this imprecision is constitutive of the reality from which discourse itself emerges. Populism is a political logic, neither inherently negative nor positive (Laclau, 2005). According to this perspective, populism is not opposed to democracy but can express itself as its radical variant. Laclau's position contrasts with that of other authors who argue that populism deviates from the liberal normative horizon (e.g. Cox, 2017; Müller, 2017; Norris; Inglehart, 2018).

Despite the challenges in defining and understanding populism, this article relies on the idea that it is an important concept in helping us explain many of the recent political outcomes and social and political movements around the world. In the course of the discussions the term has created, certain characteristics that repeatedly present themselves in different populist movements have helped form some consensus on its definition.

Based on the current literature, we understand that populism can be best defined as being both a style of communication (Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) and as a political action strategy (Betz, 2002). We believe this is a more specific definition than that of populism as an ideology (see, for example, Macrae, 1969). Betz, for example (2002: 198), conceives populism primarily as a political strategy, based on a rhetoric that evokes latent resentments and appeals to subjects' emotions. Populist rhetoric is thus designed to cause feelings of discontent and exploit these feelings politically. As the author (2002: 199) states, the strategy of populist action is that of claiming to be the spokesperson for the opinions, demands and disordered needs of ordinary people - to give them a voice.

In Moffitt's (2017) conception of political style, an axis of performative characteristics appears, including the use of language, speech, written texts, among others. He also cites an axis of aesthetic and performative elements, regarding images, self-presentation, body language, and design – aspects that are usually ignored by the performative approach (Moffitt, 2017: 48).

As Moffitt (2017, p. 33) demonstrates, within the scholarship on populism the term “political style” is not new, being employed above all to understand the political communication of populist actors - even though it has remained underdeveloped.

In Moffitt's view (2017, p.46), political style should be conceived as repertoires of incarnated performances, symbolically mediated, and idealized for audiences that “[...] are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life ”(Moffitt, 2017, p.46). In this sense, Moffitt (p.48) establishes a conception of political style that distances itself from the usual approaches of populism as an ideology. Based on this conceptual choice, I propose that the populist communication style be examined in two dimensions: (1) its narrative structure, which encompasses an appeal to the “people” - united to defeat the antagonists who are governing or protected by the establishment, in turn responsible for the socially “deficient being” (Laclau, 2005); and (2) its narrative style (Engesser *et al.*, 2017).

As Panizza and Morelli (2009: 40) demonstrate, “the appeal to the people” and especially to those subjects historically excluded from political and social rights can best be understood as populism's normative basis, founded on an emancipatory promise. From these authors' perspective, populism represents a disruption with the existing unjust social structure. As a response to this unfair scenario, it would propose to reconstruct a new, truly democratic order, in which the common people, by defeating their dominator, would compose the new *demos* – thus, the legitimate holders of sovereignty. Populist movements claim to speak for the forgotten mass of common folk by conveying the true source of legitimate power in the people themselves - people whose demands have been systematically ignored by professional politicians, the media, and “politically correct” intellectuals (Canovan, 2004: 242).

Müller (2017), on the other hand, argues that populists claim to be anti-establishment but are often found alongside elites (p. 34), advocating for their demands. The polarization of society, structured in antagonistic terms between people and elites, is a central element to the scholarship on populism as a style of communication (Bennich-Björkman *et al.*, 2017: 6). An antagonistic worldview is its precondition and its fundamental message is animosity - often construed in aggressive language (Bennich-Björkman *et al.*, 2017). Rich and powerful elites, however, are not the only possible targets of populist antagonism. In fact, in several countries (Ostiguy and Casullo, 2017), it has attacked other groups, such as low-income immigrants. For Ostiguy and Casullo (2017), populists hold a great aversion not only to political establishments and elites but also to what the authors call the “social other” (2017: 6) - even if this “other” is not a part of the social elite. This is a fundamental attribute to populism, the authors state.

The literature on the characteristics of the populist communication style is practically consensual on the important role within populism of the discourse against political elites and the so-called political establishment (Barr, 2009). As we understand it, an anti-establishment approach is characterized by blaming the antagonist for a certain society’s “disabilities”. If their institutions and power structures are corrupted or are not as they “should be”, it is said to be the fault of those who are considered the creators and/or maintainers of the situation. These actors are, therefore, taken as the disputes’ preferential targets, and their defeat is seen as a *sine qua non* condition for a better world.

### **Crisis, misrepresentation and populist communication style**

Bos and Brants (2014:706) argue that the use of “highly emotional” messages is an important feature of populist communication. Guasti and Almeida (2019:153) state that the representation crisis has a strong appeal in the contemporary social and cultural context and that the literature on populism tends to highlight anti-political, anti-partisan, and anti-establishment discourses and strategies. This aspect opens an opportunity for us to discuss the challenges that misrepresentation poses for representative democracy. For Guasti and Almeida (p.153), misrepresentation claims express not only voters’ dissatisfaction but also represent a political strategy and style, designed to discredit their adversaries and to persuade the public of their position. Such claims have the potential to directly affect the political system and cultivate a political crisis. In this sense, misrepresentation speeches often expose a crisis to mobilize political support and demand immediate action. Solutions put forth by populism include the removal of the opponent, new types of representatives and participatory policies, and the adoption of a more direct link between the (populist) leaders and the people. This type of rhetoric, in turn, leads us to one of the stylistic traits of populist discourse: emotionalization (Engesser *et al.*, 2017).

In other words, a populist style of communication fashions narratives of critical situations (Bos and Brants, 2014), sometimes truly cataclysmic ones. Populist actors can create a language of “prophets of chaos”. For Guasti and Almeida (2019:155), the crisis is used as an *anti-status quo* tool, i.e., the crisis arises as a result of a mismatch between the political system and the political demands of the people. It is also a product of misrepresentation allegations, which excessively emphasize the void between the representatives and the represented in order to gain political attention. It is important to note that the negative narrative does not imply, objectively, a negative situation. However, an objective negative condition is necessary for a populist narrative to be adhered to. Given the great deal of imprecision surrounding the conceptual definition of *crisis* (Roitman, 2016), it is difficult to distinguish when one in fact exists.

Roitman (2016: 20) defines a crisis as a condition that requires a decisive judgment between alternatives. Crisis means change; Roitman conceives it as a gap between the expectations of the people and contrasting historical developments. This author does not propose invalidating the concept or denying its existence, but only that we should observe it as a “blind spot” and consequently consider the ways in which its narrative constructions are regulated - as also indicated by Guasti and Almeida (2019). The notion of crisis raises an account that artificially presumes a prior reality in which a supposed normality was operating. Its effect is to suppress questions about the long-term structures and systemic conditions of a given problem. In other words, just as crises legitimize the state, they can also justify a hypothetical state of emergency.

The rise of populism has been associated by the literature with the globalization crisis (Cox, 2017). Cox (2017: 16), for example, argues that this growth is intimately connected to a widespread and exaggerated idea of power reconfiguration in the international order, which would, in turn, lead to a post-US, post-liberal and post-Western system. According to the author, this idea became the truth of our era and has held important political consequences:

[...] One of these has been to make many people living in the West feel deeply uncertain about their future. This, in turn, has made many of them look to those politicians and movements who say they will stand up for the West; or, in the American context, make America great again. Moreover, the view that a power shift was or is underway has also helped those in the UK make the case for Brexit. Indeed, in the UK the argument that the EU, in particular, was in terminal decline and that one had to look to other parts of the world economy—China and India most obviously—clearly played an important role in mobilizing the case for Brexit. (Cox, 2017:16)

Cox takes up the idea that the crisis as a concept is linked to a future that is unpredictable and obscure. In this sense, the author draws on Koselleck’s (1988) ideas about how the notion of progress - the focus of populist discourse - is instrumentalized by certain ventures in the aims of reaching this contingent future. The very notion of progress is a narrative of eventuality, and the battle for the conception of a new or different future consists in the crisis itself.

Roitman (2016:28), on the other hand, proposes that we ask ourselves a key question: compared to what does the idea of crisis make sense? We do not intend, in any way, to abandon the notion of crisis as an important explanatory key. However, as there is almost a consensus in the academic and public debate scene on the fact that we are presently living a democratic crisis, shedding light on the factors that mediate and construe this perception becomes paramount. It is important to investigate the roots of such systemic, crisis-causing conditions. In order to understand MBL’s populist style, I also try to develop an empirical analysis of how the group frames the crisis in its discourse.

## Populism as a cause of the crisis?

The notion of a crisis of democracy is constantly associated by scholars with the idea that disruptive external forces degenerate democratic institutions. The idea that populism operates as an external force that causes the crisis itself became hegemonic within Political Science in the debates about the rise of populism. For instance, in the book *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism* (2018), Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart see the growing support for populist leaders as the cause of the breakdown of “[...] long-established patterns of party competition in many contemporary Western societies” (p. 4). However, this argument does not address the causes of the political crisis in a broader sense. Authors tend to simplify the debate on the origins of populism (Abelin and Gobbi, 2019) to a generational and moral contest of values, in which political cleavages, dominated by social and distributive conflict, would eventually be overcome (Norris and Inglehart, 2018: 445). Norris

and Inglehart (2018) argue that authoritarian populism is a materialistic reaction, while adherence to liberal democracy, on the other hand, would be explained by the concept of post-materialism. Inglehart coined this last concept in 1971; for the author, the support or rejection of liberal democracy can be explained by generational difference, in the sense that those living in times of greater prosperity would be and have been post-materialist, while those who live in periods of greater difficulty would qualify as materialistic.

In his contribution to the investigation on populism's roots, Müller (2017) argues that the possibility of a social actor speaking on behalf of the "real people" as a way to challenge the elites is always present. From this perspective, the rise of populism would depend more on the existence of political actors willing to embody the unfulfilled promises of democracy than on popular openness to such ideas. However, this would not explain, for example, why Brazil's President Bolsonaro – a far-right and authoritarian populist politician – became recently so popular, after more than twenty-five years of a political career (Abelin and Gobbi, 2019: 8). Furthermore, the argument does not address the broader scenario of the causes for the political crisis. The present article proposes instead that we will better comprehend the roots of populism if we begin by analyzing the contradictions and limits of liberal democracy itself. Instead of viewing populism as causing the crisis of democracy, it is more fruitful to consider it as a symptom or a reaction to this crisis (Volk, 2013).

Moreover, populism's negative historical conception is extremely impacted by superficial notions of democracy, which idealize liberal democracy as universal. Much of the recent research on populism has almost exclusively focused on cases from the northern hemisphere, a tendency that entails a strong regional bias. This is a major problem, seen as populist experiences from the Northern Hemisphere are universalized and the long trajectory of discussions on populism in Latin America is ignored. In fact, Latin American populism is generally analyzed from a highly stigmatized perspective (see, for example, Mounk, 2018; Müller, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2018; Todorov, 2014), as an experience that "fails" in comparison to what is considered to be ubiquitous, that is, the European and American liberal democracies. Nonetheless, based on Latin American experiences, some authors (see, for example, Collins, 2014; De la Torre, 2013; Roberts, 95; Weyland, 2001) have distinguished classical populism from what they call "neopopulism". According to Collins (2014), neopopulism is different from the classical form because it presents a more exclusive economic model. Neopopulism is, in this sense, populism for the introduction of neoliberal policies.

## Populism and new gatekeepers

The rise of populism in political science studies and other fields has commonly been associated with the emergence of new communication technologies. Classical Latin American populism had the radio as one of its greatest instruments and, later on, the television (Haussen, 2005). Classic populism has taken advantage of the new possibilities brought about by these technologies to promote a more direct mode of communication with a given country's population. Faro, for example (1981:89), argues that the use of radios grew a lot in Brazil during the 1930s due to the intense populist propaganda promoted by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP). For the first time, populations isolated from the urban centers had

access to the national news. For Morán (1981:82), Getulio Vargas's<sup>3</sup> populist communication style was similar to that of Nazi Germany. The DIP, according to Morán, had stark similarities with Goebbels' National Council of Nazi Culture. Getulio Vargas's style of radio speech, which elevated him to the role of the workers' leader, was also comparable with the Nazi strategy. Following Morán's reasoning, one might say that the argument that ICTs promote populist communication is, thus, not completely original (Tracey and Redal, 1995).

Welp and Wheatley (2009) argue that the use of ICTs and other novel types of media to propagate soundbites in response to a crisis could lead to populist speeches benefiting charismatic leaders at the expense of traditional political heads. According to the authors, recent or newly established democracies are more vulnerable to populism because information, in these contexts, is less regulated by the state and by civil society. In such scenarios, populists can more easily manipulate the media and gain monopoly on public discourse. Furthermore, the authors argue that political parties would already be weakly institutionalized and additionally undermined by the consolidation of power of populist leaders. Nonetheless, in spite of it being an interesting analysis - and of having made early conceptual links between populism, new technologies, and the crisis of democracy – Welp and Wheatley's argument did not predict the rise of populism and the crisis of democracy in consolidated liberal democracies, such as the United States.

In the celebrated *The People versus Democracy*, Mounk (2018) argues that, in recent years, populists have been the most successful actors at using social media to undermine the basic foundations of liberal democracy. The author states:

Unfettered by the constraints of the old media system, they have been willing and able to say anything. Perhaps their rhetoric will prove to be unstoppable [...] it is difficult for a rational politician to win a debate with a three sentence answer when his rival is offering a one sentence answer, especially when he's able to blast his simplistic take all over Twitter and Facebook. (Mounk, 2018: 150)

Mounk (2018) points to a major communicational reconfiguration rising with the emergence of social media and declares that populists tend to use these tools in a more favorable way than their adversaries. However, the author does not mention the new and deep power relations that were inaugurated with this emergence, relations that are primarily controlled by large corporations. In this sense, he seems to propose an end to the capacity of large communication conglomerates to retain control of narratives and, above all, curb and define gatekeeping. As we will see below, this process is not as simple and transparent as it might seem.

Garimella, Morales, Gionis *et al* (2018:3) define gatekeepers as users who receive content from both political trends - the left and the right - but only produce content from a single side, thus “filtering” information. ICTs have deeply changed this global media gatekeeping landscape. Although they have influenced interactions between institutions, extra-media, people, routines, pressures, the ideological environment, and wireless technologies (Cossiavelou and Bantimaroudis, 2009), ICTs have not put an end to the political establishment's traditional gatekeepers, such as political parties and corporate media. Despite this, several new forms of gatekeeping have emerged. Tenney and Sieber (2016), for instance, show how the restriction of access to information is performed by algorithms; Ristow (2013:

3 Getúlio Vargas was the 14th president in Brazil's history. Leader of the 1930 revolution, which put an end to the First Republic in the country, he ruled authoritatively until 1945, when he was deposed. Elected president in 1950, he led a government marked by strong nationalist development. He committed suicide in 1954, in the midst of a serious political crisis that threatened to throw him out of power again.

6) also warns about the considerable power operated by the Silicon Valley gatekeeper corporations. Populist actors, however, seem to be passing through these gatekeeping mechanisms. The phenomenon is a result of social medias' capacities and that of mass networks, which involve billions of people and create space for the policies and mass discourses typical to populism.

According to Gerbaudo (2018: 746), populist leaders and movements utilize social media in an intense scale. The author argues that virtual social media platforms have become essential for large-scale political activity; they are instrumentalized by activists as an expansive resource of mass mobilization (Gerbaudo 2013). Social media has built a digital mass of anti-establishment policies that the author calls “populism 2.0”. Gerbaudo (2018) also argues that populist candidates and movements from the right and left possess an extensive know-how of social media, which emerges as an important feature in their characterization. Recent studies have shown, for example, how social bots were mobilized by populist actors in US elections and the Brexit campaign (Bastos and Mercea, 2018; Bessi and Ferrara, 2016).

Gobbi (2016: 69) has demonstrated how the MBL used Reddit as a platform for its virtual debates, including the discussions about its relationship to the political party system. At the time, the movement discussed three possibilities for electoral strategy: the foundation of its own party, joining several different parties within the spectrum of the right, or joining one single another existing party – the “New Party” (Partido Novo) or the Democrats or the Party of the Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), for example. The prevailing decision, at least in the short-term, was to colonize<sup>4</sup> several parties (Gobbi, 2016).

The publicly discussed issue of the relationship with political parties shows how the movement laces humor into its debates. An example of this follows:

Definition of the Party to which MBL Militants would go. Or even the creation of one. Perhaps a Free Brazil Movement Party (PMBL). Although it reminds me of PMDB<sup>5</sup> (haahahha<sup>6</sup>)<sup>7</sup>.

Several contrasting positions on the issue were discussed in the posts' comment section. Renan Santos, MBL's coordinator, participated in this discussion. In his comment, he states that the movement's statute prohibited members from joining left-wing parties, with the possibility of expulsion. The following quote is taken entirely from the topic's discussion section and was freely translated by the author.

In our manual:

**BRAZIL FREE MOVEMENT PARTY VINCULATION RULES:** The Free Brazil Movement has no formal relationship with any political party, and acts in a free and independent manner for the full achievement of its objectives. Thus, considering the solely political character of this movement, the following rules are established concerning the party's attachment to the different profiles members of the group. Coordinator: is affiliated to parties considered "neutral" (PSDB, DEM, PMDB, PV, PSC, NEW, PRP, PSB, PPS, PTdoB, PRTB); he/she must present an explanation for the maintenance of their affiliation - based mainly on electoral and strategic arguments. Effective members: Effective members are those who belong to the Board of Directors of the Municipal Branch. They may have an affiliation to parties considered "neutral", but there

<sup>4</sup> Despite its unusualness, we employ the idea of 'party colonization' as a political strategy of occupying political parties

<sup>5</sup> The PMDB, currently called MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement), is one of the largest and most traditional Brazilian political parties. The former President, Michel Temer, is a member and one of its leaders.

<sup>6</sup> Referring to one of the most popular forms that Brazilians use to express laughter.

<sup>7</sup> [https://snew.notabug.io/r/territoriolivre/comments/3m0xe7/defini%C3%A7%C3%A3o\\_do\\_partido\\_em\\_que\\_os\\_militantes\\_do\\_mbl](https://snew.notabug.io/r/territoriolivre/comments/3m0xe7/defini%C3%A7%C3%A3o_do_partido_em_que_os_militantes_do_mbl) (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

may not be more than one per party. Members affiliated to Partido Novo (NEW PARTY<sup>8</sup>) are preferred. Supporters and Collaborators: They may have an affiliation with several parties, excluding the traditional left-wing parties (PT, PSOL, PCB, PCdoB, PSTU, PCO). Non-compliance with such rules will result in the nullification of the municipal co-ordinator, and, in extreme cases, in the closing of the subsidiary.

The Reddit platform is important for the organization. Although any user is able to register (it is an open platform), it remains an important vehicle for debating political strategies and the organizations' agenda. Literature has shown that Reddit forums have been widely used by right-wing movements in several parts of the world (Dal Bosco, 2018). Reddit became even more utilized after other networks began banning alt-right accounts or forums for inciting violence (Id: 55). In the present case, the topic the MBL discusses on Reddit demonstrates how the movement has incorporated debates from the Internet into internal organization issues. This is an example of how social media and new technologies reconfigure the impacts of media and traditional gatekeepers such as political parties, creating new opportunities to challenge hegemony. This challenge may represent both a threat to and an opportunity for the exercise of democracy.

### The Free Brazil Movement (MBL)

The history of the MBL is one of rapid and constant transformation. The party, which originated in 2013 from the Brazilian branch of the transnational organization *Students for Liberty* (founded in 2008 in the United States), was initially created with the intention of massifying the values of libertarianism and anarcho-capitalism (Gobbi, 2016). However, as Gobbi and Dias (2017) argue, MBL would later take on the mission of "leading the masses" during Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. To do so, they adapted their discourse to a more popular aesthetic, avoiding sensitive issues that could offend 'common sense' - such as abortion regulation and LGBT marriage, policies supported by some liberal sectors. After Rousseff's impeachment, MBL moved away from its libertarian genesis and established its identity firmly in the conservative field (presently, in the far-right).

MBL's privatization discourse (Dias, 2017; Tatagiba, 2018) contrasts with the nationalistic stance it puts forth. In fact, even if apparently contradictory, the MBL defends the sale of Brazilian state-owned companies whilst expressing an aggressive nationalist discourse. As Machado indicates (2017: 48), the corruption schemes disseminated by the *Operação Lava Jato*<sup>9</sup> (Operation Lava-Jet) and the media have served as a driving force to justify, even idealize, a new Brazil. In its speeches, the MBL denounces an establishment completely dominated by socialists, communists, and leftists, who must be held responsible for the "deficiency" of the current Brazilian society. The movement's identity is built in opposition to left-wing ideology, especially to the Workers' Party, which is denounced by the organization as responsible for the whole system's corruption. This opposition is evidence of a deeply anti-liberal discourse.

8 The New Party (Partido Novo) was recently launched into Brazilian politics. It has an ultra-liberal agenda. Its President is the multimillionaire banker, João Amoedo. The party carries out selective processes for its candidates, who can spend up to 4 thousand reais to get through them. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/com-taxas-de-ate-4-mil-partido-novo-busca-candidatos-para-2020-23884926> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

9 As Gonçalves and Moreira (2018 p. 50) argue, the so-called "Lava Jet Operation" is a set of investigations carried out by the Brazilian Federal Police that revealed a scheme in which big construction companies, large businessmen, politicians from the legislative and executive branches, and political parties were part of an organization that ran a corruption scheme involving embezzlement and money laundering. For more information, access <http://lavajato.mpf.mp.br/entenda-o-caso> (Consulted in June 6, 2020).

The MBL appears to be acting like other new right-wing populist groups: prone to attack supranational institutions, the media, and the courts, thus taking up an anti-establishment position. The movement is known for increasingly carrying out attacks on mainstream media as well as political institutions and public services. Recently, it raised the flag for the preservation of Western society's Christian values. According to Tatagiba (2018: 119), in the broader context of Brazilian social movements, the MBL is the organization with the greatest capacity to combine actions in the streets with investments into institutions, especially after it created its candidacies.

The MBL defined itself as non-partisan in 2013 but reassessed its position in 2015 with the goal of launching the candidacy of Fernando Holiday (Dias, 2017: 46) as a councilman of São Paulo (the largest city in Brazil). It has been launching candidacies for the chamber of councilmen from all over the country since the 2016 municipal elections, when eight of its forty-five candidates were elected. At that time, the movement managed to elect Holiday (DEM-SP),<sup>10</sup> one of its national leaders, with more than 45,000 votes. A black and gay candidate, Holiday is notorious for his opposition to the Brazilian black and LGBT movements' agendas. He became the youngest city councilman in São Paulo at the age of only 20.<sup>11</sup> The electoral strategy pursued in the 2018 elections resulted in the election of five federal deputies, who were then distributed among four different parties: the Republican Party of Social Order (PROS), the Democrats (DEM), the Progressive Party (PP) and the Christian Social Party (PSC).<sup>12</sup> Kim Kataguirí (DEM), MBL's founder and the movement's main public face, received more than 460,000 votes and became, at the time, the fourth most voted congressman in the state of São Paulo.<sup>13</sup>

On December the 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the MBL posted the following publication. It manages to cover more than one of the categories of political strategy proposed by our analytical framework.

The worker's Party (PT) nature is the same nature as that of the worst dictators the world has ever seen. The statist mentality goes against the ideals of freedom that the MBL defends. The less power the suited bureaucrats have, the better for the people. Less state, more freedom.<sup>14</sup>

10 <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/mb1-eleceu-oito-de-seus-45-candidatos/> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

11 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2017/02/1860269-negro-e-gay-vereador-mais-jovem-de-sao-paulo-critica-cotas-raciais.shtml> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

12 <https://epoca.globo.com/expresso/animado-com-desempenho-nas-eleicoes-mbl-articula-criacao-de-partido-proprio-23296083> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

<https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/eleicoes/2018/movimentos-como-mbl-livres-tem-desempenho-de-partidos-de-expressao-nacional-5wzlc3wip8fpcmq1yvkd25b> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

14 <https://www.facebook.com/mb1ivre/photos/335013406622809> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).





Picture 1 - Page Published on November 27, 2015

Source: Oficial MBL fan page.

"Everything in the State, nothing against the State and nothing outside the State." Benito Mussolini, Fascist dictator"

"We need more State and less Free market." José Guimarães, leader of the Workers' Party government in the Chamber of Deputies"

The image above compares Benito Mussolini to the then-leader of the workers' party government in the Chamber of Deputies. According to the MBL, thus, the essence of the workers' party is evil and totalitarianism, nationalization, and collectivism. One can see how the very notion of the State is conceived by the movement as a problem or threat. This publication reveals the ultra-liberal conceptions defining the organization's basic agenda: the idea that the market is the very antithesis of the state. While one, the market, represents freedom, the other is the materialization of oppression. From their view, the state has been infiltrated and is dominated by socialists.

## Methodology – A Hermeneutic Approach to Populist Social Media Communication

To contribute to the debate on how populist actors render the institution of the political party through social media, this article utilizes a hermeneutic approach so as to codify the texts of different political actors - social movements, parties, and politicians. We aim to identify the presence of typical characteristics in populist communication.

The list of populist traits and mechanisms proposed by this article is not a definitive one. It should be constantly updated, as the construction of narratives and meanings through discursive strategies are interactively rebuilt and resignified, in a process where political actors respond to social and institutional constraints that lead them to reformulate their behaviors and discourses.

I analyze 499 messages published by MBL’s Facebook page between November 2014 and November 2017.<sup>15</sup> This time-frame allows us to observe certain changes in the interactions between MBL and political parties, a switch-over from arguments of denial to those of necessity. Firstly, I conducted an inductive reading of the more than 15 thousand posts collected; based on the reading, the coding categories were created. Due to time restrictions,<sup>16</sup> I drew a random sample of 499 posts that covered the entire period.

I intended to avoid a simply lexical analysis. Rather than counting how many times the word 'elite' was mentioned, for example, the utilized methodology allows us to analyze broader textual compositions. These could express the meaning of the elite – here understood as the antagonists of the people - and encode it in a variable dummy form (for example, Yes or No for the “*parties as pillars of liberal democracy*” category). The following figure explains how dummy coding works. As we can see, the categories may overlap; that is, a post can be classified into more than one category.

| post published                  | Parties as the personification of corruption | Parties as representatives of the elites | Parties control the establishment | Parties are authoritarian | Parties are clientelist | Parties are collectivist | Parties are irresponsible with public accounts | Parties are pillars of liberal democracy | Parties are instruments for good people | Parties as the embodiment of the positive | Parties fight against collectivism |
|---------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 2014-11<br>21T12:34:53<br>+0000 | 0  | 0  | 0                                 | 0                         | 0                       | 0                        | 0  | 0  | 0                                       | 0   | 0                                  |
| 2014-12<br>10T20:23:41<br>+0000 | 0  | 0  | 0                                 | 0                         | 0                       | 0                        | 0  | 1  | 1                                       | 1   | 0                                  |
| 2014-11<br>15T19:09:07<br>+0000 | 0  | 0  | 0                                 | 0                         | 0                       | 0                        | 0  | 0  | 0                                       | 0   | 0                                  |
| 2014-12<br>03T01:08:10<br>+0000 | 0  | 0  | 1                                 | 1                         | 0                       | 0                        | 0  | 0  | 0                                       | 0   | 0                                  |
| 2014-11<br>08T02:06:42<br>+0000 | 1  | 1  | 1                                 | 0                         | 0                       | 0                        | 0  | 0  | 0                                       | 0   | 0                                  |

Figure 1 - Example of dummy codification

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Facebook was chosen for the analysis because it is the social media platform with the largest number of users overall - over 2 billion members globally,<sup>17</sup> and about 127 million in Brazil.<sup>18</sup> Facebook is, accordingly, more popular than the competing platforms and, despite the importance of YouTube, it was the most relevant channel for communication within the MBL. It should be noted that, in March 2020, the MBL was the right-wing organization with the largest number of likes on Facebook - over 3 million.<sup>19</sup>

15 The data was accessed through the Netvizz platform.

16 I intend to work with the entire collected data in the future.

17 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

18 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

19 <https://www.facebook.com/mblivre/> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

## The analytical framework

Data coding was based on fourteen categories which reflect the different discourses about political parties. Seven of these are positive – that is, they frame political parties in a favorable light - and seven are negative. I explain each one of these groupings below, relating them to the specific characteristics of populism as set forth by the literature.

### Negative categories

#### *Parties as the exemplification of corruption*

Cass Mudde (2004) considers populism to be an ideology that understands society. Ultimately, it would conceive the social whole as being divided between two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the “pure people” against the “corrupt elite”. Populists, says Mudde (2004), argue that politics should be an expression of the general will of the public, thus more moralistic than programmatic. According to the author, the normative differentiation between “elite” and “people” is essential to populism’s moralist perspective. Its opponents would not only be people with different values but consist in representations of true evil.

Corruption plays a key role in the literature on populism, regardless of whether it is defined as an ideology or as a political strategy. Müller (2017), who has a rather negative view of populism, argues that its adepts justify their behavior by claiming that they alone represent the people, allowing them to confess their negative doings openly. According to the author, this mechanism would explain why revelations of corruption rarely seem to harm populist leaders: from the perspective of their followers, they would be engaging in corruption for the benefit of the authentic people.

Roberts (1995, p. 98), focusing on Alberto Fujimori's<sup>20</sup> experience in Peru, shows how that populist leader sought to mobilize public opinion against what Fujimori called, at the time, a “partyocracy” - affirming that the corruption of party’s elites had led Peru to an economic collapse. In the analytical framework presently in use, the idea of “partyocracy” translates as the notion that political parties are the expression of the “social other” par excellence, the embodiment of corruption and immorality. Henceforth in the article, I will use this term when referring to the essentialist conception of political parties as dishonest and aligned to, or always in defense of, degenerate antagonists.

#### *Parties as representative of the elites*

Populist discourse presents specific social actors as being responsible for a said society’s characterization as a “deficient being”. These actors or antagonists are often either identified as elites - those who control institutions and use their power and influence for their own good - or as marginalized social minorities who have become a heavy burden on the rest of society. For more specific examples, we can point out either the *lumpenproletariat* or external actors –

20 Alberto Fujimori was the 90th President of Peru, a position he held from 1990 to 2000. As Burt (2009, p. 386) demonstrates, in 1992, Fujimori held a self-coup, closing the congress, suspending the constitution, and assuming judicial power with the support of the Peruvian armed forces and elites. In 2009, the Special Criminal Court of Peru's Supreme Court sentenced the former president to 25 years in a closed regime, the maximum sentence allowed under Peruvian law. Fujimori was sentenced for serious human rights violations (BURT, 2009, p. 384)

that is, the underclass or foreign countries (External Antagonists) holding a privileged position, respectively. In all cases, the discourse presents the antagonists as groups or actors who have been privileged by the establishment. Only in ethnopopulism,<sup>21</sup> however, can the idea of external antagonists or ethnic groups appear as a recurring characteristic. As Laclau (2005) puts it, in such circumstances a clear boundary is drawn between the people - the community - and their adversaries. These outsiders may never be recognized as part of the social collective because the criteria for defining who belongs to a certain ethnic identity are already crystallized. In this perspective, the antagonists are represented by political parties, the political establishment's elites thus controlling the institutions.

### *Parties control the establishment*

Since the establishment is controlled by the elites, it also represents the aristocratic will, which is generally conceptually posed in opposition to the people's interests. This operation of contestation in face of the establishment is what I define as an anti-establishment approach. It criticizes one or more institutions – the media, politics, cultural values, the intelligentsia, the judicial system or the state – for providing the structure of rules, habits or powers that regulate the 'deficient being' of the people. We recognize that, in order to better understand how the construction of meaning takes place in the case of an anti-establishment discourse, it is necessary to identify the institutions being criticized. After all, the anti-establishment approach can manifest itself in different ways: anti-media discourse, anti-politics, anti-culture, anti-intellectuality, anti-justice and anti-state.

### *Parties are authoritarian*

For Müller (2017), populists spare no effort to systematically suppress civil society. The author argues that populist parties are particularly prone to internal authoritarianism because internal disagreement in a party that claims to be the only legitimate representative of the common good is not allowed. For the author, populism distorts the democratic process; in fact, if the governing party has a majority, it can justify the creation of a new constitution on the basis of the effort to re-appropriate the state for the "true nationals" of a country - the "true Hungarians", or "true Poles", for example. According to Mueller, populists are always proto-authoritarian and likely to cause serious damage to democratic systems.

Gandhi (2008) argues that nominally democratic institutions, such as political parties and legislatures, have an important function in non-democratic regimes. In his transnational study, the author analyzed how authoritarian leaders make use of political party institutions and legislatures and concluded that they are fundamental for the survival of dictatorial regimes, given that autocratic leaders use them to organize concessions to potential oppositions. Populism, in this view, can use political parties as instruments for its authoritarianism.

### *Parties are clientelist*

According to Müller (2017), the populist government has three main characteristics: its attempt to kidnap the state apparatus; corruption; and "mass patronage", an exchange of

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21 Jenne (2018:5) defines "ethnopolitism" as the discourse that equates 'the people' with 'the nation', and that holds that sovereignty should be an expression of the will of the 'nation-people'.

material goods or bureaucratic favors for the political support of citizens who then become the populists' "clients". The fact is that populism has been historically associated with clientelism (Laclau, 2005). As indicated by Carvalho (1997), however, the concept of clientelism is also the target of much confusion. Despite its negligent theoretical employment, says the author, clientelism generally consists of a "type of relationship between political actors that involves the granting of public benefits, in the form of jobs, tax benefits, exemptions, in exchange for political support, especially in the form of voting" (Carvalho, 1997). According to the author, clientelism is a variable attribute of macro-political systems. On the other hand, for Hicken (2011: 291), clientelism works as a tool in building a loyal network of supporters; in the case of autocracies, it involves the creation of the regime's socioeconomic dependence and political subservience. In such a conceptual scenario, the political party stands in as the representation of these "old institutions" that survive on spurious changes of favors.

As we are aware that the concept of clientelism, as well as that of populism, is the target of several disputes, we are of the opinion that mobilizing the notion in public and political debates may be deeply derogatory, seen as it is commonly associated and confused with the idea of *coronelism*.

### *Parties are collectivist*

The understanding of collectivism presently utilized in our interpretation is based on the concept coined by Hayek (2014). According to the Austrian author and canon of liberal thought,

[...] it must always be remembered that socialism is a species of collectivism and that therefore everything which is true of collectivism as such must apply also to socialism. Nearly all the points which are disputed between socialists and liberals concern the methods common to all forms of collectivism and not the particular ends for which socialists want to use them; and all the consequences with which we shall be concerned in this book follow from the methods of collectivism irrespective of the ends for which they are used. It must also not be forgotten that socialism is not only by far the most important species of collectivism or "planning"; but that it is socialism which has persuaded liberal-minded people to submit once more to that regimentation of economic life which they had overthrown because, in the words of Adam Smith, it puts governments in a position where "to support themselves they are obliged to be oppressive and tyrannical" (Hayek, 2014: 35)

Hayek explains that the various segments of collectivism differ in the purpose for which they aim to lead a certain society's efforts. However, they all contrast to individualism and liberalism in that they aspire to order the whole of society and all of its resources. In short, Hayek classifies collectivism as being totalitarian. The explanatory key to collectivism is constantly claimed by the far-right to try, for example, equaling the experience of communism with Nazism. In other words, these are said to be similar regimes because of the State's important role in their respective economies. According to this concept, the political party is also a collectivist expression, as a representative of the state.

### *Parties are irresponsible with public accounts*

The economic instability of recent decades in Latin America has been historically associated with a populist macro-economy. While this discussion is often depoliticized, several economists argue that Latin America has lived and will live catastrophic-economic cycles due to bad political choices. Dornbusch and Edwards (1991), for example, argue that Latin America's failure is marked by populist macroeconomic policies with distributive objectives.

For the authors, Latin American countries chose economic programs that heavily depended on fiscal policies as well as expansive credit and an overvalued currency, to accelerate growth and redistribute income - without worrying about exchange restrictions. The result of these experiences was inflation and the economic system's collapse. As for de Castro and Ronti (1991: 167), populism's main characteristic would be its institutionalized under-development. It fights against strong state institutions that seek to limit the power of the rulers, the authors state. The natural consequence of this would be weak financial organizations. In this sense, political parties represent economic backwardness, embodying the desire to control financial institutions.

### Positive categories

#### *Parties as pillars of liberal democracy*

As Kinzo (2006: 23) argues, the academia holds the consensus that political parties are fundamental instruments in the democratic regime and that the occurrence of fair and free elections in which parties compete for public office is essential in identifying whether a political system is a democracy. For the author (p. 28), parties have important roles in the electoral and decision-making arena, especially in the formulation, planning and implementation of public policies, operating as legitimate actors in the power and political negotiation processes. This argument has certain commonalities with Robert Dahl's conception of *polyarchy* (1997). For that author (1997: 26), in order to establish a true democracy, all citizens would necessarily: possess full opportunities to formulate their preferences; express these preferences to all and to the government, through individual and collective action (which would also be expressed by political parties); finally, that their preferences be considered as having equal standing by the government. Consequently, we understand that the present category refers to parties as being democratic instruments that safeguard liberal democracy.

#### *Parties as instruments for good people*

According to Dahl (1997: 29), there are at least two dimensions to democratization: public contestation and the right to participate in elections and public office. There is a perception that the "party" as an institution can only be colonized by good and worthy people; more than that, the notion that skilled people need to and should run for public office. In this theoretical structure, a separation arises between parties and candidates. The party is an instrument for well-meaning and capable people to get involved in politics and advance their agendas. Nonetheless, it is possible that the individual may be detached from it.

#### *The party as the embodiment of a positive agenda*

As noted above, parties are part of the democratic system and help the country to implement a positive agenda. In other words, as Kinzo (2006: 25) demonstrates, obtaining legitimate political power has only been made possible through the organization of political parties. Democratic representation became viable when modern parties took on the tasks of structuring electoral disputes and mobilizing the electorate. We therefore understand that the political party can also be conceived as the embodiment of an agenda or action plan, that will in turn enable the country to emerge from an economic and political crisis.

#### *Parties fight against collectivism*

According to Hayek (2014: 104), political freedom is meaningless if not accompanied by economic freedom. For the author, this is a prerequisite for any other type of freedom – the opposite of what is promised by socialism. The prerogative of economic action, for Hayek, comes before other freedoms of choice but also carries other risks and responsibilities unique to it. Hayek voices the essence of individualism: the recognition of the individual as the ultimate judge of his own objectives, coupled with the concept that individual thought must govern. For him, social ends are analogous to the intentions of several individuals who contribute for the satisfaction of their desires. The state has its own sphere, limited by the subject's consensus. When the state exercises control over topics of frequent disagreement or dispute, it suppresses individual liberties. For Hayek, the political party should be a bastion for the struggle for economic freedom, defending all against the state's oppression and collectivist tactics.

### *Parties are honest and rational*

According to Faria (2000: 49), Habermas illustrates the communication and decision-making processes of the political system with a center-periphery type relationship. The author argues that Habermas places the administration, the judiciary, and the democratic formation of opinion and will, such as the parliament and parties, at the “center” of the political system, while locating the public sphere formed by opinion formers, interest groups and associations in its periphery.

On the other hand, Urbinati (2013:102) indicates that the Habermasian deliberative argument is essentially moral and ethical. In it, the author says, the universality of rational arguments is a legitimating principle. As Urbinati argues, Habermas' reasoning is “in the name of the principles of aggregation of preferences and periodic exchange of the elected as the only pragmatic ways to solve the lack of rationality contained in political opinions without renouncing freedom, or rather, the electoral consensus” (URBINATI, 2013, p.102). In this sense, the parties are understood not only as essential collective actors with a role to play within the relationship between the subject and institutional politics, but also as important vehicles to filter public opinion for the benefit of decision-making institutions. The parties operate in an ethical and rational manner, resolving antagonisms that lack understanding in the public sphere.

### *The party as a resistance tool in the face of elites*

As previously addressed, populist discourse identifies the antagonists who rule institutions and the political system. The antagonists are protected by the establishment and held responsible for social deterioration. The political party represents the interests of the people and fights against those who occupy the political and financial establishment.

### *Parties fight against dictatorships*

Political parties played an important role as leaders of the social movements that opposed the military dictatorship in Brazil (Keck, 1991). Based on an example from another Latin American country that has also experienced a military dictatorship, Carruthers (2001: 346) makes the argument that, although party support declined with the restoration of civilian rule, party politics incorporated the concerns of the constituencies that had challenged the military dictatorship – such as the human rights agenda. According to the author (p. 346), “[...] for

better or worse, political parties will ultimately be the decisive influence on the potential for a popular social movement to emerge, in any form”.

**Table 1 - Codification of positive conceptions with regard to political parties**

| Positive Categories   | Definition   |
|---|--|
| Parties as pillars of liberal democracy   | Parties are democratic instruments and safeguard liberal democracy. They are fundamental to the guarantee of federalism.   |
| Parties as instruments for good people   Parties as instruments of citizenship  | Capacited people need to coonize parties and compete for public office. The party is an instrument for well-meaning and empowered people to engage with politics. It is an instrument of citizenship.  |
| The party as the embodiment of the positive agenda  | The political party as the embodiment of an economic and social agenda that will enable the country to emerge from the economic and political crisis.  |
| Parties fight for economic freedom (against nationalization)   parties defend individual liberties   Parties fight against collectivism | Political party as the bastion of the struggle for economic freedom, against state oppression and collectivism. Defender of state deregulation and the free market.  |
| Parties are honest and rational   | Parties are essential collective actors in the relationship between the subject and institucional policy. They play an important role in capturing and filtering public opinion for decision-making institutions. Partis act ethically and rationally as a means of resolving antagonist that lack rationality in the public sphere. |
| The party as a resistance tool in the face of elites  | The party represents the interests of the people and fights against antagonists and elites occuyping the establishment and political institutions.   |
| Parties fight against dictatorships   | Political parties are fundamentaly for the emergence of social movements and in the representation of civil society. They defend the freedom of self-organization. They are actors who fight against dictatorships inside and outside the country.   |

Source: Authors' elaboration.



**Table 2 - Codification of negative conceptions with regard to political parties**

| Negative Categories                                  | Definition   |
|--|--|
| The party as the embodiment of corruption            | Parties are essentially bad. They represent bad practices and corruption. They are the expression of the “social other”, they are immoral and dishonest and defend the degenerate antagonists.   |
| Parties as representative of the elites              | Parties represent antagonists, who are the elites of the political establishment, who control the institutions.  |
| Parties control the establishment                    | Parties represent the corrupt political, economic and social establishment. The anti-establishment approach can manifest itself in different ways: as anti-media discourse, anti-politics, anti-culture, anti-intellectuality, anti-justice, and anti-state. |
| Parties are authoritarian   totalitarian   fascist   | parties are authoritarian institutions. They do not respect the diversity of debate and they impose their authoritarian desires on the population. They defend dictatorships.  |
| Parties are clientelist                              | Parties are clientelist institutions, old oligarchs and colonelists. They are the representation of these old institutions, which survive on spurious exchanges of favors.   |
| Parties are collectivist   Parties are nationalizing | As a representative of the state, the party is also a “collectivist” expression. It acts against economic freedom and the free market, always seeking regulation and nationalization.  |
| Parties are economically irresponsible               | Parties are opposed to solid institutions that would limit the power of governments to defend weak institutions and the absence of an independent Central Bank. They represent backwardness and economic underdevelopment.                                   |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

## **The MBL and political parties: somewhere between denial and necessity**

Although MBL members have been affiliated with various political parties over time (as has been previously shown in this paper), their populist antiestablishment rhetoric - in which parties are conceived as a hindrance to democratic advance - has been duly present over the past few years. The following figures seek to explain this complicated relationship. In this section, we will discuss the probable causes of the predominance of a negative view on the party system by the MBL.

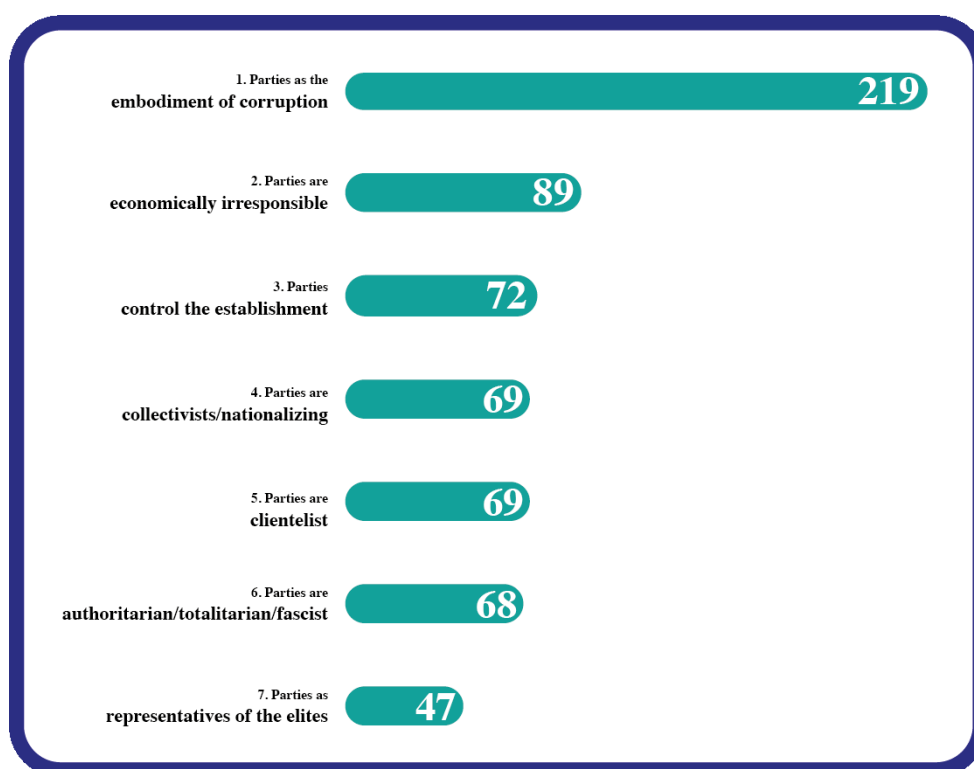


Figure 2 - Numbers of Facebook posts with negative views on political parties (2014-2017), grouped by category

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on MBL's Facebook page

Figure 2 presents the number of publications with a negative view on political parties that were published in MBL's Facebook page, grouped by category. The image's first category is the most emblematic: two hundred and nineteen posts associate political parties with corruption. However, it is important to note the political context in which this data was produced. Especially before Dilma Rousseff's impeachment (2016), the majority of posts that cited political parties also brought up the Workers' Party (PT). As such, the database on MBL's first year (2015) indicates that the anti-party discourse was, in fact, an "Anti-Workers' Party" discourse. Through the Power BI analysis service,<sup>22</sup> we could identify the number of PT mentions in the investigated posts. The software undertook a word count and cross-referenced that information with the analyzed content: the result was the number of eighty-eight mentions.

Going back to Figure 2, Category 2 shows how 18% of MBL posts state that political parties are irresponsible economically and/or with the public budget. This claim is closely related to the one contained in Category 4, that is, that the parties are "collectivists" – the same case as Hayek's argument in *The road to serfdom*. The movement believes the country is experiencing a fiscal crisis due to a Brazilian statist-like culture, a mindset that supposedly poses itself against the private initiative and that criminalizes entrepreneurship. According to this view, the state controls the entire economy and does not provide economic freedom to the population. Above all, we would argue that theirs is a philosophical conception of freedom. Based on von Mises, an icon of the liberal right, the MBL argues that the most relevant minority

<sup>22</sup> Power BI is a Microsoft business analysis service.

is the individual himself. The collectivist State is authoritarian. As category 6 in figure 2 shows, in 14% of its posts, the organization accuses parties of authoritarianism, of not respecting freedom and diversity, of ignoring the conservative majority, and of maintaining close and irresponsible relations with dictatorial countries like Venezuela and Cuba.

The third negative category, “Parties control the establishment”, indicates that 14% of the analyzed publications suggest parties control the political establishment, especially left-wing parties and the Workers' Party. There are 72 posts arguing that the PT has either powerful influence or total control over the media as well as over Brazilian cultural values, intellectuality, the judicial system and the state in general. The passage conveyed below, for instance, evinces that the *Globo* group – Brazil's largest press conglomerate – is controlled by the Workers' Party. Picture 2, posted on the movement's Facebook page, merges *Globo* and the PT's logos and announces the statement “*O Globo* makes up lies about the MBL”.

#### WHY DOES O GLOBO INSIST ON LYING ABOUT THE MBL?

Once again O Globo Newspaper shows itself to be pro-government and having to lie about MBL. They said the guy who was arrested yesterday in Brasilia carrying guns was from the MBL WITHOUT ANY PROOF.

THIS MALICIOUS GOVERNMENTISM CANNOT PASS!

Send emails to those responsible for yet another lie in favor of Dilma's government.<sup>23</sup>



Picture 2 - “O Globo” makes up lies about MBL.

From MBL's Facebook official page. Published on November 13, 2015

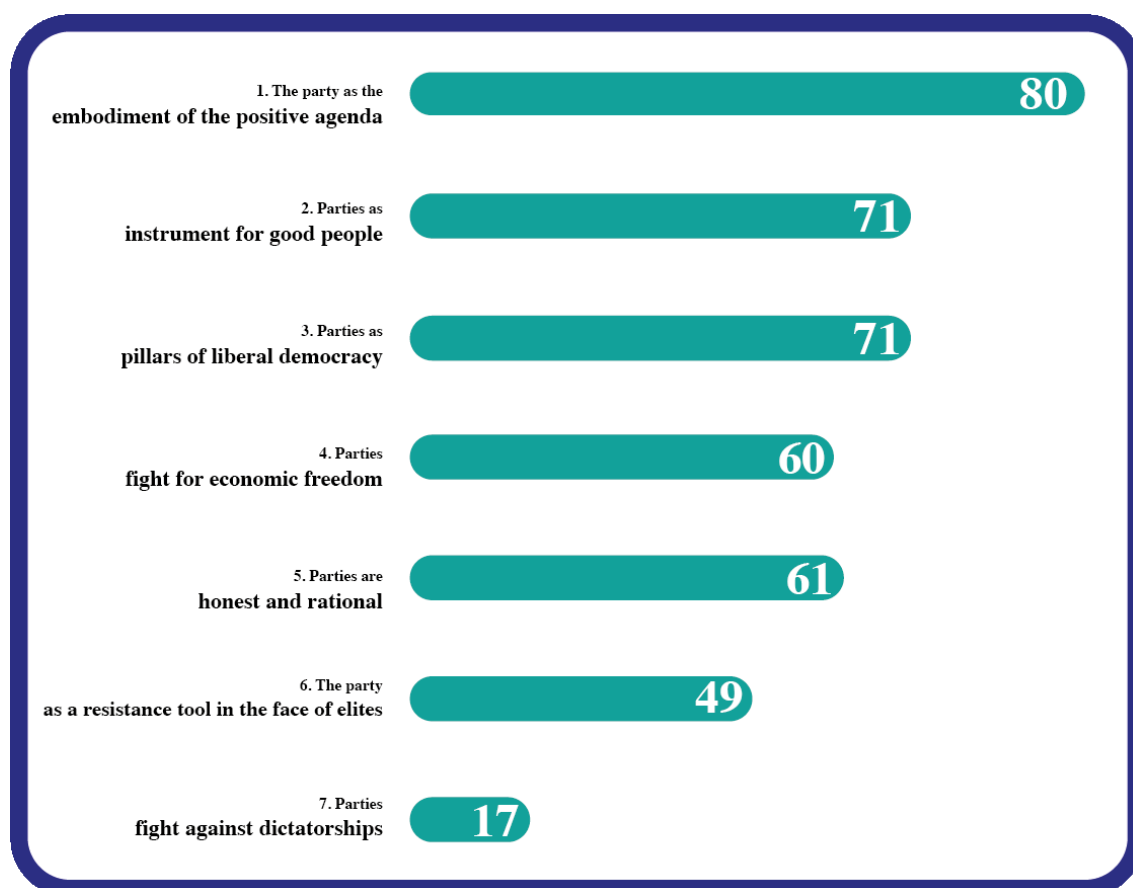
Source: Official MBL fan page<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/mblivre/photos/por-que-o-globo-insiste-em-mentir-sobre-o-mblmais-uma-vez-o-globo-se-mostrando-g/326802794110537/> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/mblivre/photos/por-que-o-globo-insiste-em-mentir-sobre-o-mblmais-uma-vez-o-globo-se-mostrando-g/326802794110537/> (Consulted in March 18, 2020).

Figure 2 also reveals that parties are considered clientelist in nearly 14% of publications. The MBL argues that political parties are bankrupt institutions that serve other purposes; for example, to make party chiefs rich from the electoral and party funds.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the category “*parties as representatives of the elites*” refers to the idea that the establishment is the embodiment of the aristocratic will, and that it opposes the interests of the people and “true Brazilians”. In this sense, the MBL compels people to organize themselves, even asking that they join the movement as a way of disputing leftist hegemony in Brazilian institutions. This argument will also be used to justify the movement’s launching of candidates through various parties in other instances.



**Figure 3 - The number of Facebook posts with positive views on political parties (2014-2017), grouped by categories**

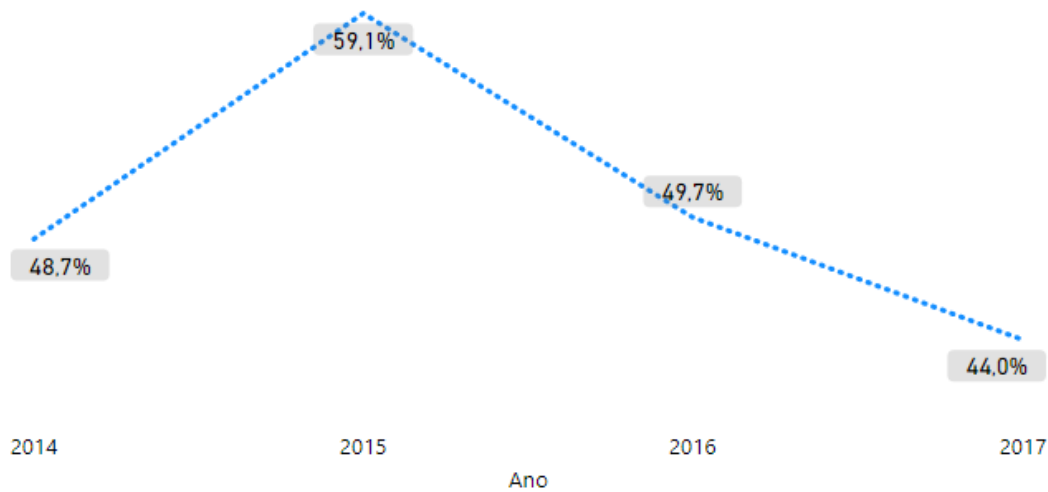
Source: Authors’ elaboration, based on MBL’s Facebook page

On the other hand, the number of publications with a positive view on parties confirms that the MBL pays little praise to this institution, even though the movement has launched candidates through it since the 2016 municipal elections.

<sup>25</sup> The Special Fund for Financial Assistance to Political Parties, better known as the Party Fund, is a monthly grant to political parties, consisting of a form of public funding to political parties.

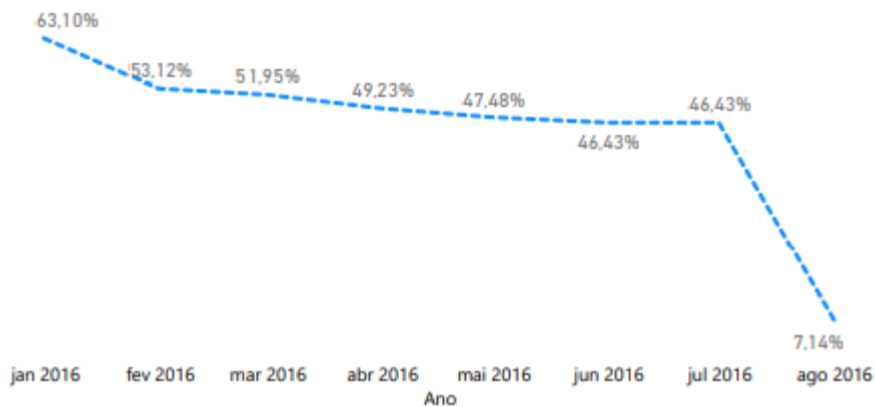
The Special Campaign Fund, better known as the Electoral Fund, is also a form of public financing of Brazilian political parties to finance electoral campaigns. The amount is allocated to parties in election years to pay campaign expenses

The graphs below show the changes in the relationship between the MBL and political parties through time:



**Figure 4 - Percentage of Facebook posts with negative views on political parties (2014 – 2017)**

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on MBL's Facebook page



**Figure 5 - Percentage of Facebook posts with negative views of political parties (January – August 2016)**

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on MBL's Facebook page

The graph shows that the negative perceptions of political parties by the MBL peaked in 2015 and subsequently dropped. Negative conceptions of political parties in the MBL's Facebook publications declined sharply in 2016, especially in August, when Dilma Rousseff was impeached. Not only did the MBL support the impeachment, but it also declared its support for Michel Temer's government. In addition, leaked audios revealed that political parties

opposed to Rousseff supported the MBL's demonstrations financially.<sup>26</sup> As previously mentioned, as of 2016 the MBL started to launch its own candidacies through various parties (many of which had financed the organization) that also formed the basis of Michel Temer's government. During Temer's presidency (2016- 2018), the group was called by the government itself to publicly support economic reform policies<sup>27</sup> centered on austerity packages and privatizations.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, one can see how the MBL's inconsistent and contradictory discourse on political parties was profoundly strategic. In other words, between the denial and the need of a relationship with the parties, the organization's conception became more positive from the moment the Workers' Party was removed from the presidency, as well as when MBL started to launch candidates who (not by chance) formed the basis of the following governments.

It is also interesting to note how the MBL's concept of "people" has changed over time. Those seen as "privileged" and responsible for the welfare deficit, since receiving high salaries paid by the taxpayers - public servants, for example – became the antagonists of the Brazilian people after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. Recently, the movement began to call Cubans who opposed Castro's regime as "real Cubans", indicating that the MBL also applies this mindset beyond Brazilian borders. The reference to Cuba may also be an attempt to draw attention to what Brazil could be if it were not for the movement's intervention and the impeachment. That is, the movement claims that, if it hadn't been for them, Brazil would have 'become' Cuba or Venezuela and would have suffered those countries fates of grave social unrest - even though the Workers' Party's government at the time was guided by social democracy.

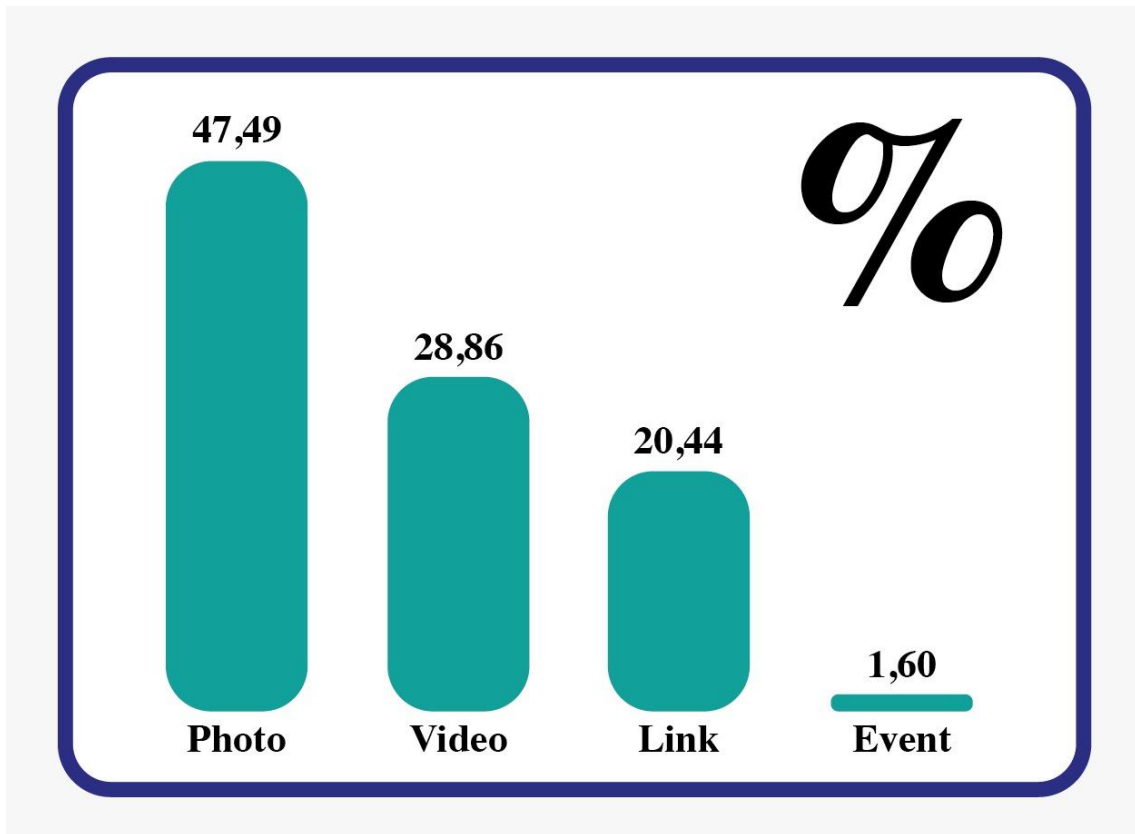
The notion of "external antagonists" exemplifies how the populist extreme right considers that a kind of international left-wing coalition is threatening Western values. Eatwell and Goodwin (2019, p: 60) demonstrate how part of Trump's followers fostered a conspiracy theory, for example, in which a network of Washington bureaucrats was supposedly associated with "cultural Marxism" and Gramsci-inspired ideas, aimed at spreading left-wing liberal values in U.S. institutions. An obsession with this conspiracy theory is also perceived in the case of the Brazilian right, especially in MBL's posts. An analysis of the previously discussed 'negative' categories shows how the MBL has built a populist style of communication, especially in its anti-systemic discourse, that sees political parties as part of a rotten and corrupt structure.

Besides helping us understand the MBL's conceptual changes through time, figures 5 and 6 indicate how the movement (as well as other populist actors) can create or foster crisis scenarios (BOS and Brant, 2004; Guasti and Almeida, 2019). Its anti-party discourse, particularly before 2016, may prove to be a strategy in discrediting the political system. As Guasti and Almeida (2020) correctly argue, populists are often exposing the crisis to mobilize political support and demand immediate action, which may include removing their opponent. As the figures depict, the MBL has held different positions before and after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Before 2016, criticism of the party system was much more fervent. This case is an example of how populist actors frame political crises in their favor.

26 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/monicabergamo/2016/09/1816377-temer-chama-mbl-para-pensar-como-tornar-reformas-mais-palataveis.shtml> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

27 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/monicabergamo/2016/09/1816377-temer-chama-mbl-para-pensar-como-tornar-reformas-mais-palataveis.shtml> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).

28 <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2016/12/15/promulgada-emenda-constitucional-do-teto-de-gastos> (Consulted in March 14, 2020).



**Figure 6 - Types of Facebook posts**

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on MBL's Facebook page

Figure 7, shown above, illustrates another important variable in populist communication: how the number of photos or videos is closely related to the simplicity in speech. Below, we present a brief classification which may assist our inquiry for what we consider to be a discourse with complex argumentative structure (0) to an extremely simple type of discourse (4).

| Simplicity  |     |
|---|-----|
| Complex or confusing argumentative structure. Use of far-fetched vernaculars without explanations of their meanings. Missing visual elements. | (0) |
| Complex argumentative language, with complex or confusing structure, but no use of jargon or technical language. Missing visual elements.     | (1) |
| Complex argumentative language, complex structure, but no use of jargon or technical language. Some visual appeal.                            | (2) |
| Argumentative language with simple cognitive structure, with visual appeal.   | (3) |
| Use of language and simple cognitive structure with much visual appeal. Simple and impactful framework, simple language.                      | (4) |

Figure 7 - Level of simplicity

Source: Authors' elaboration

The role of simplification as a central element in populist discourse is widely discussed by the scholarship (CANOVAN, 2004; ENGESSER et al, 2017; ŽIŽEK, 2017). The use of jargon and specialized language is a form of authority appeal, but speaking differently from the public and with complexly structured ideas is exactly the opposite of what populist communication tends to seek. Simplification, in this case, is not only noticed through the use of the lexicon and simple sentence structure, but also by the appeal to audiovisual resources, which make the text easier to understand and reinforce the process of connecting the message's sender with the public. Making complex issues seem simple is a goal of populism in general. In our opinion, texts that are especially simple, visual, short, and humorous - easily replicated and instantly "readable", thus memetic texts like the ones in social media - can be considered as an ideal of this pursued simplification.

## Final remarks

Firstly, we believe that the proposed analytical framework can be useful in understanding how the populist communication style works. The radical right seems to be using the populist communication style with great success, which may explain its recent advances in the political field as well as its dominance in the virtual arena and, above all, the rise of anti-establishment right-wing populism in Brazil.

The anti-Worker's Party approach has shown itself to be an essential constitutive element of the MBL – a movement who perceives the PT as the main actor in the degenerate party-



establishment. In this sense, for the MBL, the anti-Worker's Party discourse has appeared to become equivalent to an anti-establishment discourse. The MBL is an example of how there was a connection in the country between the radical right - which developed attractive anti-systemic narratives – and a populist style of communication. This may be an important factor to understand the electoral success and the advance of the far-right in Brazilian politics.

This paper sought to discuss the theoretical basis of the relationship between information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the crisis of democracy and populism. We argue that populism is a reaction to, and not a cause of, the crisis of liberal democracy, given that the increase of social inequality precedes the discredit of institutions, at least in the eyes of the population. The growth in popular disappointment with politicians' false promises generates new possibilities for popular representation and the reduction of the state. There is an increase in the perception of injustice and inequality promoted by the statal structure, which is in turn the result of a decreasingly mediated influence between financial capital and political decisions. Social media and ICTs have a key role in this process by reconfiguring gatekeeping relationships and, consequently, creating new opportunities to challenge hegemony (Abelin and Gobbi, 2019:23).

As this article has hopefully shown, the ICTs support the emergence of a populist logic in political debates and, although they offer democratic opportunities, they can also deepen the crisis of liberal democracy. Populist groups and leaders have an affinity for the use of social media. The MBL, which utilizes typical features of populist communication, represents a successful case of new technology use for political gain. This right-wing organization has used social media extensively, defending deeply contradictory opinions on political parties as valid institutions - which proved, we have argued, to be strategic. Before Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, the parties were demonized and associated with the left and a collectivist state; afterward, positive conceptions of the political party came forth. We consider that this phenomenon is associated with the MBL's support of the subsequent governments and the launching of candidacies that colonized the parties making up the new governing base. By using all this expertise in new technologies, the MBL also exemplifies the way populist actors bypass gatekeepers. Finally, by advocating a profoundly neoliberal reform agenda and defending economic austerity, the MBL proves itself to be an example of a neo-populist group.

In this paper, a theoretical debate on the meaning of populism was advanced. Populism is a deeply controversial concept that has no true consensus in academia. Within these disputes, a significant problem arises: that of epistemic colonialism, in which the global north applies concepts, visions and experiences specific to liberal democracy to a wider range of issues, deeming that view as universal. When liberal democracy is the supreme horizon, any different conceptions, however, appear as being threats to the model, seen as something which needs to be fought. This is clear in the case of populism, as Latin American scholarship continues to show. The subject merits further analysis and should appear in future research.

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# Resignation: a new strategy by dominant political parties in Africa to maintain power?

Alem Asmelash Werede,<sup>1</sup> University of Siegen

**Abstract:** This research focuses on the period between 2016 and 2018 in Africa and looks into resignations by heads of state and governments. The research finds that there are similarities in these resignations, compelling one to inquire whether the process is a trend. The realities in the continent are changing. Political mobilization, mainly through social media, have reoriented political tactics; the demography of the continent is forcing political actors to pursue new approaches; finally, there are new elites on the rise in the continent. When resigning in the face of protests, incumbent political parties and their leaders give the illusion of change, but real democratic transformation in Africa requires more concrete steps, currently not in sight.

**Keywords:** Resignation, democracy, Africa, political parties, institutionalization.

## Introduction

Between 2016 and 2018, uncharacteristic of Africa's politics, the continent witnessed a wave of resignation from its leaders (Heads of State or Government). In what looked like a domino effect, long serving leaders submitted resignation letters in the face of popular protests and scandals. Presidents of Zimbabwe, South Africa, Seychelles, Angola, and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia resigned during those two years. Peculiarly, all the countries that went through the resignation process are one-party dominated states, in which a single party ruled for decades without any discontinuity. From a one-party dominated state perspective and by taking the cases mentioned above as a frame of reference, this paper tries to highlight the current wave of resignations in Africa arguing that it could yet be another approach these dominant parties are pursuing to maintain power. In doing so, the paper highlights the historical and political circumstances leading to the rise of these parties and looks deeper into the facts that led to their recent tactical transformation to maintain power.

The People Party (Parti Lepep, PL) in Seychelles controlled power since 1974, ruling as the sole political party until 1992. Even with the adoption of the multi-party system in 1992, it continued as the dominant party until 2016.

As the champion of the country's independence struggle, the African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) of Zimbabwe has managed to retain a firm grip on power since independence. President Robert Mugabe, the long-serving president of the country, saw his support in the party dwindle, ultimately leading to his resignation in 2017.

Another champion of independence, South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) maintained its dominance since 1994, after it won the first election in the country's post-apartheid history. President Jacob Zuma managed to serve as the president of South Africa and his party for nine years (2009-2018) before resigning.

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<sup>1</sup> Alem Asmelash Werede holds LLB and MA from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia and is currently finalizing his second masters in Roads to Democracies at the University of Siegen, Germany. His research interest focuses on regional integration, peace and security and governance.

The People's Movement for the Liberation (MPLA) of Angola led the Angolan independence movement in collaboration with other rebel groups. After independence, the MPLA managed to have the upper hand to form a government; but a civil war, largely fueled by the Cold War, broke out between it and the other liberation groups. The war ended in 2002 with MPLA's triumph, enabling it to retain its position as the dominant party of Angola until the present.

The Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) gained power in 1991, after two decades of civil war. Since then, it has managed to rule the country with complete control over the political space.

Certain developments in the continent - including Africa's youth bulge, access to internet, and new approaches to social movements - are increasingly forcing dominant political parties to adopt new ways of holding onto power. These new developments not only reorient political participation but also force dominant political parties to find new ways of prolonging their rule.

## Dominant Political Parties

A dominant political party can generally be defined as a party that manages to maintain power through elections for a long period of time. Giovanni Sartori (1976) provides a perspective on the length of rule by arguing that a party should win at least three consecutive elections to be considered dominant.

Dominant parties are able to thrive in both democratic and non-democratic systems. The main difference between the systems is that, in the former, there is actual fair competition among the parties – wherein, due to its popularity, political agenda, or nature of the opposition, the dominant party wins consecutive elections exclusively through democratic means. In the latter, however, the dominant party manages to win the elections through undemocratic ways, that may include rigging the elections, using government power to weaken the opposition, stifling the media, and so on.

Another point of departure between dominant parties in democratic and authoritarian systems is related to the control of economic means. Dominant parties usually maintain power through economic influences that hinge on the distribution of state resources to elites and other influential groups (Ora, 2017). In democratic systems, the dominant party has less access to employ state resources for its political gains, mainly due to the existence of strong institutions that effectively provide checks and balances. On the other hand, in authoritarian states, the dominant political party can use state resources at will for its political cause without any accountability (Doorenspleet and Nijzink, 2013).

In another definition that reflects the attributes of a dominant party, Maurice Duverger (1959: 308-309) states:

A party is dominant when it is identified with an epoch; when its doctrines, ideas, methods, its style, so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch.... Domination is a question of influence rather than of strength: it is also linked with belief. A dominant party is that which public opinion believes to be dominant. ... Even the enemies of the dominant party, even citizens who refuse to give it their vote, acknowledge its superior status and its influence; they deplore it but admit it.

Dominant parties mostly align themselves to some period or occurrence regarded by citizens as an important historical departure point. This offers them the required legitimacy to leverage their dominance in the political system. Presenting themselves as part of a political cause also gives them the foundation to dominate the political landscape. This is well documented in the rise of political parties in Israel in the late 1960s and post-colonial political parties in Africa and East Asia (Doorenspleet and Nijzink, 2013).



An institutional approach on the topic of dominant parties, led mainly by Ora (2017), suggests that dominant parties are generally created by the conscious decision of elites and leaders. Such parties can only be devised in political systems in which elites and leaders command comparable power. Ora (2017) suggests that dominant political parties proved to be more stable mainly due to the consensus created among elites, which makes defection less likely. Consensus requires negotiation, and that can only be made between parties that have considerable negotiating power. He argues it is unlikely for a dominant party to thrive in situations where either the leader or the elite is more powerful.

Another research on dominant political party systems include Arian and Barnes' (1974) work. It connects the strength of such systems to the dominant party by arguing that 'so long as the dominant party performs intelligently, the opposition can do little that is effective. Even bad decisions will not prove to be disastrous, unless the opposition is in a pole position to take advantage of them, and it seldom is.' Levite and Tarrow (1983), on the other hand, argued that that attempts by opposition parties to regain legitimacy, particularly after national crises, could potentially lead to the decline of dominant political parties.

T.J. Pempel's *Uncommon Democracies* (1990) describes the cycles that a dominant party needs to overcome to assert its dominance. The initial 'mobilization cycle' of maintaining dominance regardless of crises that may occur requires the employment of functioning political strategies and historical circumstances that bestow the advantage on the dominant party. However, the party's inability to preserve its base or overcome a crisis leads to the end of its dominance. Pempel believes that dominant political parties are rare, and the result of effort and luck. Thus, the large number of dominant parties makes the connection between dominant parties and the African continent an interesting case, worth investigating.

### **Dominant Parties of Africa**

The concept of dominant parties is strongly linked to Africa's political realities. In fact, the term 'dominant party' was first coined in the 1960s to capture the political phenomenon of the continent, when numerous strong parties were rising in the wake of decolonization (Doorenspleet and Nijzink, 2013). Their rise was primarily understood from two perspectives: the modernization and national integration theories. Modernization theory argued that dominant parties are the consequences of social reorganization requirements of the time. Accordingly, "as society shed traditional authority structures, citizens developed more complex political attitudes, and as participation became mass-based, parties became necessary for mobilization and political linkage" (Ora, 2017). The social reorganization was thought to be undertaken by a dominant ruling organ that could deliver the transformation required.

On the other hand, national integration theory understood the phenomenon as the consequence of an elite's decision to unite the newly independent states, that were highly divided on ethnic cleavages (Ora, 2017). Dominant parties were found to provide the basis for national integration by reducing the 'cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities' (*ibid*).

Between 1970 and 1990, the continent went through different stages of political development. The coup-infested decades and economic regression of the late 1970s and 80s were followed by the third wave of democratization in the early 1990s, which saw the transformation of one-party systems to multi-party democracies. The transformation also resulted in the birth of new dominant political parties, that rose from ashes of Cold War induced civil wars. These newly created dominant parties included Ethiopia's EPRDF, Nigeria's People's Democratic Party, and Rwanda's Rwandan Patriotic Front. They became additions to the pre-existing dominant parties, including ZANU-PF of Zimbabwe, MPLA of Angola, and Botswana Democratic Party of Botswana, which had already cemented their dominance since

independence. South Africa's ANC was a result of a late decolonization process that only enabled the party to assume power after South Africa had its independence in 1994.

All the while, Huntington's (1968) argument that the stability of dominant parties in Africa lies on the intensity of the struggle for power and on the party's ideological commitment remains relevant to both the dominant parties of post-independence and post-1990. If we read the argument in conjunction with Duverger's (1959) definition of dominant political parties referred to above, one can concede that the rise of dominant political parties in Africa's post-independence period got its 'epoch' from the struggle for independence, while, for the post-1990s, the decades of armed struggle in civil wars provided the required defining rationale.<sup>2</sup>

Other theories that explain the rise of dominant political parties in Africa base their cases on both economic and general stability arguments. The economic argument urges that a single strong party is required to instil proper economic policies and gather financial resources for redistribution. However, solely basing the relevance of dominant parties on economic arguments is not fully accurate, unless other factors support it, as argued by Finer (1964). That piece of research tested different hypotheses for the formation of dominant political parties in Africa, including the nation-integration argument, the stability argument and the national-consensus argument; but concluded that none of these can stand by themselves to explain the phenomenon. The rise of large number of dominant political parties in post-colonization Africa is a result of both the transition to independence and the question of building nations out of multi-ethnic societies and poorly demarcated borders, that challenged the elites of the time (*ibid*).

## Africa's Governance Challenges

Currently, Africa faces numerous governance challenges that are manifested in different forms. Mentioning all these challenges is not the intention of this paper. However, alluding to a few of them may reflect the depth and the imperativeness of the issue of governance, in light of the article's focus. The objective is to portray a few of the political challenges that have led to protests, which in turn lead to resignations by the dominant parties under consideration.

### Unconstitutional Change of Governments

Since the continent's independence, one of the governance issues that has determined power balances has been the unconstitutional change of governments historically associated with *coup d'états* and, more recently, with third-term governments.

Unconstitutional change of government relates to accessing or maintaining power through illegal means (AU, 2007: Art 23). The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance articulates the different grounds that are termed as illegal means to attain or maintain power. Accordingly, putsch or *coup d'état*, intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government, replacement of democratically elected governments by armed dissident or rebels, refusal of the incumbent government to relinquish power after elections, and amendment or revision of constitution or legal instruments infringing democratic

2 Both EPDRF and Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) fought civil wars against incumbents that were both autocratic and highly repressive. In Ethiopia, the Derge regime (1974-1987) killed and imprisoned thousands, making it the most murderous regime in the history of the country. On the other hand, in Rwanda, the RPF toppled a government that was responsible for instigating and leading the genocide of more than to 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

change are all provided as grounds of unconstitutional governmental change (AU, 2007: Art. 23).

Between 2003 and 2012, 12 *coup d'états* took place in Africa (Vines, 2013: 91). In that time, the AU suspended the Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, and Niger from membership. On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the AU would also declare the removal of Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi by the military an 'unconstitutional change of government', suspending Egypt from membership. Furthermore, the AU has imposed sanctions on six members - namely CAR, Comoros, Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritania, and Togo. It has also issued strong condemnations to 16 countries (Burundi, CAR, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, São Tomé e Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Togo).

Coups in Africa are due to different factors that require a political, economic, and social assessment. Several writers since the 1970s have tried to propose theories thought to describe the major reasons behind the proliferation of coups in the continent. In 1978, Jackman reached the conclusion that social mobilization and a dominant ethnic group had been destabilizing factors for post independence in sub-Saharan Africa (Jackman, 1978). According to Jackman, there was an immediate need to transform the continent from rule by autocracies to democracies in order to salvage it from coups. In 1984, Johnson, Slater and McGown postulated that "states with relatively dynamic economies, whose societies were not very socially mobilized before independence and which have maintained or restored some degree of political participation and political pluralism, have experienced fewer military coups, attempted coups, and coup plots than have states with the opposite set of characteristics" (Johnson, Slater and McGown, 1984: 622-640). This meant that states with strong economic performance, productive employment and diversified exports have stayed stable. In 2007, Collier and Hoeffler attributed the causes for military interference to greed, whereby the military conducts coups by anticipating the control over the different 'rents' of a country. These rents mainly pertain to the natural resources the country owns and aid (Collier and Hoeffler, 2007). Moreover, Collier and Hoeffler have also connected the risk of coups to military spending in Africa and concluded that, in countries with a low coup risk, governments tend to respond by reducing military spending, whereas in countries with a high coup risk, governments tend to increase military spending (*ibid*).

Recently, the reoccurrence of coups is largely attributed to economic performance and governance issues. The African Development Bank reported that the coups undertaken between the years 2002-2012 have certain commonalities between them (AfDB, 2012). The report suggests that, even if the countries enjoyed some measure of economic achievement and stability in the early 2000s, they had, however, underperformed in terms of governance and real GDP (AfDB, 2012: 10-13). In this regard, the report showed that in Chad (2006), Guinea Bissau (2003), Madagascar (2009), and Mauritania (2008), military coups had coincided with a decline in governance performance (AfDB, 2012:11). Moreover, in relation to real GDP performance, the coups took place only after countries found themselves with economic problems. The successful coup in Guinea Bissau in 2003, for instance, took place after a recession with a GDP rate of -7.1% in 2002 (AfDB, 2012: 13). Similarly, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, in 2006, 2008 and 2010, respectively, experienced coups a year after economic performances declined (*ibid*). Collier and Hoeffler (2005) also concur on this point and conclude that poor economic performance reflecting in terms of low income and lack of growth are factors that lead to coups. Collier and Hoeffler further argue that these factors cause 'coup traps' (*ibid*). The notion refers to the idea that once a successful coup takes place in a country, the

likeliness of another coup happening there is greater, since the first coup legitimizes future ones.

Unconstitutional way of maintaining power in Africa are also manifest via the recent trend in third-termism. The trend has seen different leaders in the continent amending constitutional provisions pertaining to term limits, most often with the intent of extending the already existing two term limits. Leaders in Rwanda, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have followed this approach at different times. However, the term limits' extension has mostly faced fierce denouncement by the international community and continental institutions. The AU, in particular, has always invoked its charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance to decry such moves. Nevertheless, states have continued extending term limits, with Burundi being the latest country to do so, in 2018.

Surveys conducted by the *Afrobarometer* suggest that the overwhelming majority of citizens in the continent favor term limits. Incidents in Burkina Faso and Burundi have shown how citizens are willing to conduct street protests when leaders try to extend term limits (Boniface Dulani, 2015).

### Post-Election Violence

The other governance challenge that this paper briefly discusses is elections and trends in post-election conflicts. Even if elections cannot portray an all-round picture of democracy in a given country, they are an integral part of democratization processes. Elections provide the opportunity for citizens to elect the leaders they want in power, as well as giving the opportunity for both policy selections and the participation of the citizenry in the governance process. However, many elections carried out in Africa are associated with post-election violence. This has, at times, shed doubt on the continent's readiness to carry out democratic elections.

Democratization has been spreading throughout Africa since the 1980s. With the end of the Cold War, the number of multi-party-political systems has also grown. In fact, between 1989 and 1995, the number of countries in a multi-party-political system grew from five to thirty-five (Vines: 94). In the same period, thirty-eight African countries held elections (AU, 2010: 15). The number reached 49 by 1997 (*ibid*). However, the held elections lacked the required quality; in most cases, they were associated with violence, eroding people's necessary trust in democracy and electoral processes. The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) has reported that 19% to 25% of elections in Africa are affected by violence (USIP, 2010: 1). The National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) reveals that, between 1945 and 1989, in the 352 election events occurring in the continent, 18.5% were marred with violence that resulted in civilian death. Between 1990 to 2006, in a total of 330 elections, the percentage of violence-ridden elections had grown to 28.18% (Meriläinen, 2012: 10). The post-election violence present in Côte d'Ivoire (2010), Kenya (2007), Nigeria (2003 and 2007), Zimbabwe (2008), Guinea Bissau (2012) and Mali (2012) exemplifies electoral violence episodes in the continent.

Electoral violence, however, is rarely spontaneous. It is instead, in Kambudzi's words, 'a result of long-neglected but very important issues' (Kambudzi, 2008: 5). Election-related violence is the product of the 'protracted political mismanagement in a country – whether that involves tyranny, dictatorship, lack of accountability and corruption, etc.' (*ibid*). These problems brew in a society for some time before blowing up in electoral periods. Nevertheless, the structural issues that have taken time to blow up are not the sole factors instigating election-related violence. Problems associated with the election process itself also engender such results in the post-election period, mostly serving as trigger factors.

The subject's seriousness and the extent of its effects were especially witnessed in the 2007 post-election brutality in Kenya. Given the fact that Kenya is considered a relatively peaceful country, currently playing an important role in East Africa, it was somewhat unforeseen to see it succumb to this. The particular violence took the lives of some 1,500 people and left another 300,000 displaced (Roberts, 2009). The incident showed that even the most stable nations on the continent are not immune to election-related violence, for as long as grievances are left unresolved. To date, Kenya finds itself in an uncomfortable election period, where the highly contested elections could easily lead to violence once results are announced.

Election-related violence is also largely associated with the political fragility of African countries; the latter not only contributes to post-election violence, but also occurs as a result of it as well. If a state with weak political, economic and social systems finds itself in an election-related violence situation, the violence will further downgrade and exacerbate the fragility of that country (*ibid*), thus creating a cycle that can only be broken by tackling the basic reasons behind state fragility. The consequences of election violence are multifaceted. They range from cancelling or disputing the election result to the death of civilians and, in severe cases, civil wars. Election-violence might readily lead to large population displacement, humanitarian crises, and an increase in arms smuggling. These ramifications not only disturb a country's peace and stability but also transcend to neighboring countries.

### Transnational Organized Crimes

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) in Africa is one of the threats with serious implications for the continent's peace and security. TOC in Africa includes drug trafficking, human trafficking, small-arms proliferation, money laundering, oil bunkering, illegal poaching, piracy, among others. The scope of TOC in the continent is currently growing and involves hundreds of millions of dollars. Taking into account the fact that TOC touches on many actors and increasingly diversifies its engagements, it poses an imminent threat to Africa's peace, security, and governance (Gastrow, 2013: 3).

TOC tends to cross borders between countries, thereby involving different nations from a single region. In addition, the nature of TOC in Africa is not limited to one region but connects various regions around the continent. For instance, West Africa's involvement in drug trafficking not only involves the western African countries but also Central Sahara and East Africa. Human trafficking from East Africa also encompasses northern Africa countries, as the trafficking route commonly finds its destination to the Middle East.

TOC hampers state capabilities by eroding their resources. This is more evident when one looks at the extent of the crime and the amount of money involved in the activity. In Nigeria, 300,000 barrels of crude oil are bunkered from the country every day (Sieff, 2008: 188). In East Africa, from 100,000 migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia alone, in 2012, about 15,000,000 USD were reportedly paid to the smugglers (UNDOC; 2013: 17). In 2011, the amount of ivory smuggled to Asia from East Africa alone was worth 31.5 million USD (UNDOC; 2013: 33). The number of elephants in the continent has decreased to 450,000, that is, less than one percent of the number in 1930s (Gastrow, 2013: 3). Pirates in Somalia had reportedly grossed about 150 million USD in 2011 (UNDOC, 2013: 40).

TOC's effects are not limited to economic hindrances; they also infiltrate into a country's democratic institutions (the judiciary, executive and the parliament). In this regard, a number of political party leaders and officials in Africa are accused of having affiliations with drug traffickers and acquiring millions of dollars via drug money (Aning, 2009: 5).

The other important face of TOC in Africa is its link with terrorism. TOCs conducted in the continent are, at times, linked to terrorist groups. In particular, in the Central Sahel, the Al-Qaeda affiliated group operating in the area - also known as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

(AQIM) - was reported to finance its activities through drug trafficking (Foster and Sanders, 2012: 6). AQIM sought to capitalize on the confluence of drugs via the East Africa and across Chad, Niger and Mali, by providing logistical and transportation support to drug traffickers, thereby enabling the terrorist group to have a continued finance supply for its terrorist activities (*ibid*).

Moreover, there is evidence of a link between Somalian pirates and the Al-Shabab, a terrorist group in that same country. The pirates seek assistance from the terrorist group in the form of protection, training, and finance, and then pay a certain amount of the dividends to the group. The portion of the ransom earnings paid to Al-Shabab varies depending on its level of involvement in the pirating attempt: 5-10% for protection, 20% for weapons training, 50% for financing will be reportedly paid (Foster and Sanders, 2012: 7). Even if the dealings are done strictly for business, with no ideological similarity between the pirates and the terrorist group, the payment for the services ends up financing terrorist activity.

The underlying reasons for TOC's proliferation in Africa are multi-dimensional. The operations look for institutional fragilities in state structures and utilize those fragilities to their own advantages (Aning, 2009: 6). In explaining the root causes for organized crime in West Africa, Pape has articulated how "[West African] governments ... are too weak, too corrupt or too consumed by their own problems to enforce laws or adequately monitor their coastlines and airports. Add to that how there are tens of millions of poor potentials 'mules' and the picture becomes all too clear" (Pape, 2005). UNODOC, on its part, attributed the cause for organized crime in East Africa to, on the one hand, the existence of illicit markets in other regions, thereby utilizing the Eastern Africa route to reach to those markets; on the other, to the weakness in the region's rule of law (UNODOC, 2013: 7).

Naturally, there are also some peculiar causes for some of the TOCs in Africa. For instance, according to local narratives, the triggering factor for the rise of Somali piracy around the Gulf of Eden was the 2005 tsunami that washed away toxic containers onto the shores of the local beaches, thereby evidencing the rumor that other countries were using Somalian shores as dumping areas (UNSC, 2011). In this case, the act of piracy started as a retributive act with some local backing (UNODOC, 2013: 35).

With the rise of economic and population growth in Africa, there is no doubt that the continent will be, in the future, a heightened target for groups engaged in TOC. For instance, the percentage of drug users in the world is expected to reach 25% by 2050 - the majority of this increase being attributed to the rising urban population in developing countries (Gastrow, 2013: 2). With weak institutional capabilities at a state level to handle these problems, TOC's effect on peace, security, and governance in Africa could prove to be increasingly difficult to control.

### **2016-2018: Leadership Resignation in Africa**

The period between 2016 and 2018 saw an awakening by African incumbent dominant political parties to resort to a new strategy: resignation. Since the third wave of democratization in the continent, this has indeed heralded a new political tactic, posing both new opportunities and challenges. The phenomenon situated countries at a crossroads between adopting full-fledged democracy or facing the rebirth of stronger and more cunning dominant parties.

The trend started in 2016, when Seychelles' President James Alix Michel announced his resignation, following the opposition parties' sweeping victory in the country's parliamentary election. The results of the election marked a shake-up in the political landscape, after decades of control by Michel's party, Parti Lepep (PL). In fact, since its independence in 1976, Seychelles has seen four presidents from the PL ruling alternately. Following a constitutional

amendment, the country only adopted a multi-party system in 1991. Yet, even then, PL's dominance never showed signs of wearing down – that is, until 2016.

The following year (2017) witnessed even more astounding resignations, when two of the three longest serving presidents in Africa, President Eduardo dos Santos of Angola and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, resigned from office. President Eduardo dos Santos had served as president for nearly four decades in the oil-rich Angola. His resignation, mainly influenced by poor personal health, saw the rise to presidency of Joao Lourenco, a Defence minister and loyalist to dos Santos. The MPLA had ruled Angola since the independence, in 1974, at which juncture the country found itself in a post-independence civil war between the groups leading the emancipation movement. In 2002, the MPLA, led by dos Santos, rose to victory and ended the civil war, thus maintaining the party's rule. Eduardo dos Santos acquired his grip on power in 1979 and would carry on in power for another almost forty years (until 2017).

Zimbabwe's long-serving President, Robert Mugabe, was literally forced to resign after the military took over the country. Mugabe served as president for thirty-seven years. Nevertheless, his rule led Zimbabwe to difficult economic and political hurdles. His popularity among the citizenry and in his own party ZANU-PF deteriorated even more when he favoured his wife, Grace Mugabe, to succeed him over Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. On November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Military arrested Mugabe and negotiated with him to relinquish power. He later agreed to resign from office and Mr. Mnangagwa was sworn in as president.

The wave of resignations continued in 2018, when the continent's two strongest parties - namely, the ANC and the EPDRF - saw their leaders submitting letters of resignation. In February 2018, South Africa's ANC leader and President, Jacob Zuma, announced that he would be resigning. His tenure was marred by corruption scandals and protests that finally forced the ANC to push him to step down. The party was then quick to announce Cyril Ramaphosa, another veteran and wealthy businessman, to the post.

A few days after Zuma's resignation, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and leader/chairman of the EPDRF, Hailemariam Desalegn, announced his own plan to resign. His party had succumbed to the pressure of a three-year-long protest from the Oromo ethnic group,<sup>3</sup> which had raised grievances related to economic and political marginalization. In what followed as a fiercely competitive election within the party, the EPDRF elected Abiy Ahmed, a young technocrat from the restive region of Oromia. Unlike the parties referred above, however, EPDRF is not a post-colonial party. It is a coalition that only came to existence in 1991, after a rebellious movement that had started in the north of the country triumphed in a 17-year-long civil war. Four elections were held in Ethiopia since 1995 and in all of them EPDRF has comprehensively won. Its infamous victory in the 2015 election ousted all opposition parties from the parliament, reflecting the threat the party's dominance posed on multi-party politics.

## Post-resignation trends

The Head-of-State resignations in the abovementioned countries typify the events that ensued within each country's internal political and socio-economic dynamics. Their experiences were defined by the reasons that led to each resignation and the way each process was planned and executed. While a relatively smooth transition took place in Angola, South Africa and the Seychelles, more turbulent switches were witnessed in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless,

3 More than 80 ethnic groups make up Ethiopia. The Oromo is the majority ethnic group, constituting more than one third of the population.

a series of common traits can be identified in all of them. For instance, a commonality in the process is the early calming effect that the resignations had within each of the countries. In a continent where some leaders may readily change constitutions to extend term limits, resignations were seen as progressive steps. Following their occurrence, protest and relentless social media campaigns calmed, as was most notable in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and South Africa.

The reaction of successors in the post-resignation process also showed some similarities. For instance, dos Santos' successor, João Lourenço, was quick to frame the political questions of the citizenry by considering the two most pertinent issues in Angola: corruption and nepotism. He launched a cleansing campaign which started with firing Isabel dos Santos, Eduardo Isabel dos Santos' billionaire daughter, from the state oil company, Sonangol. Her brother, José Filomeno dos Santos, was also sacked from Angola's \$5-billion Sovereign Wealth Fund, FSDEA (Bloomberg, 2018). Moreover, high-ranking officials - including the governor of the Central Bank - were removed from office. While the citizenry appreciated the political moves, one can see - especially considering the less dramatic and relatively passive responses of the dos Santos family members - that prior measures taken to implement changes at the party level had already been negotiated before the public rundown, with concessions being made between the old and new forces in power.

A relatively similar phenomenon was also witnessed in Ethiopia. Since gaining the premiership, Abiy Ahmed has taken measures that range from freeing all political prisoners to removing key officials from their posts and engaging with opposition political groups. In this transition, he has faced little opposition from the losing group, which was willing to see most of its officials removed and their economic-benefit connections terminated. In all this, the citizenry showed support to the premier's actions, recognizing them as positive moves towards participatory and inclusive governance.

In Zimbabwe, Mugabe's successor, Mnangagwa, found himself dealing with an election less than a year into office. Since the July 2018 election was the first after Mugabe's resignation, it was considered to be an opportune moment for the country to undertake free and fair elections, and open new hopes for democracy. However, following a voting process with high incidence of electoral irregularities, post-election violence erupted in the capital Harare. Supporters of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), accused the government of rigging, which led to a heavy crackdown by government forces. The violence in Zimbabwe shows how far ZANU-PF was reluctant to accommodate dissenting voices in the country to usher in a multi-party democratic system. There are reports that Mnangagwa's government is currently contemplating a constitutional amendment to raise the presidential age limit to 55 years, after alleging that the leader of MDC, the 40-year-old Nelson Chaimsa, had been 'immature' over his handling of the electoral defeat.

In the case of South Africa, the newly elected president Cyril Ramaphosa had two issues that demanded action: corruption and fear of state capture. Ramaphosa responded by firing heads of important state-owned enterprises and ministers that had a role in facilitating the state capture. There was a general positive attitude towards his actions from the public.

### **Is Resignation the New Strategy to Maintain Power?**

In recent years, Africa has seen two trends of holding onto power: third-termism and resignation. These two contradictory trends show that leaders and political parties understand political behaviours differently. They further portray that political realities in the continent are quite diverse, requiring different intervention tactics by incumbents to maintain power.

Amending constitutions to extend term limits - also known as 'constitutional coups' - is a reflection of the extensive power a government leader holds in a state. Mainly initiated by a leader that garners the political dominance required, constitutional amendments are particularly



meant to prolong a leader's tenure, typically representing a leader's will and maneuver to remain in power. In a way, they are also reflections of the 'big man' idea in African politics, wherein a leader is seen as the protector of a nation and wields unmatched power, without being questioned by any democratic institution. Interestingly, all of the leaders that moved to extend their term limits have succeeded, except for President Compaore of Burkina Faso.<sup>4</sup>

Across the board, countries that experienced third-termism are characterized by the existence of weak opposition forces, the non-existence of checks and balances, and narrower political spaces. The incumbents in the countries are also sure that if their electorate go to the polls, they will be able to win the election through democratic means or otherwise. The only hurdle that they see is the restriction under their Constitutions that limit their leaders' terms.

The reaction of both the AU and the international community to third-termism was quite aggressive in denouncing such moves. The AU invoked its Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, that states that amending constitutions to extend term limits amounts to a *coup d'état*, effectively producing illegal governments that are not elected by the will of the people (AU, 2007). Even though the AU continued to express its discontent towards third-termism, subsequently prohibiting member states that underwent such processes from participating in its annual meetings, various countries have continued amending constitutions. The AU's inherent incapacity to launch any form of effective sanctions on states clearly transgressing its adopted rules reflected the limitations of that continental organization's reach.

Conversely, the trend in head-of-state resignations amongst dominant parties is characteristically a political party tactic, reflecting a transition in the understanding of politics in the continent. It is a shift from the 'big man' rule to a 'big party' rule, at least at the level of the incumbent, dominant political party. In such an understanding of politics, the political party is willing to see its leader resign if its ultimate goal of maintaining dominance requires him to do so. This shift has its foundation on different new developments in the continent, that are forcing dominant parties to search for novel approaches of retaining power. Based on the countries referred to in this paper, it can be argued that the rise of new elites, social media activism, and the youth bulge have restructured the approach political parties generally pursue in Africa.

### Rise of New Elites

New elites in dominant parties have recently managed to acquire the required political capital to challenge leaders. The reasons for the rise of these elites differ for each country's political situation or landscape. Short of a detailed discussion, the author will try to highlight the main reasons why new elites have managed to rise in the countries under consideration.

In Zimbabwe, it could be argued that a dismal political and economic performance and the political frailty due to the president's age were responsible for degrading Mugabe's credibility. This gave the space required for Mnangagwa and generals in the army to gain acceptance within the party and among the citizenry. In his adventures to the presidency, Mnangagwa was greatly aided by his connections in the Military - which took the first step to house-arrest Mugabe and usher him into the post.

In the Ethiopian case, on the other hand, a fast-growing economy coupled with internal strife within the incumbent party gave the chance for new elites to rise. Abiy Ahmed's

4 President Compaore tried to amend the constitution to extend term limits in 2014. However, popular uprising broke out soon and forced him to flee the country. Following the ousting of the President, a new amendment by Burkina Faso's constitutional commission reinstated a two five years term in the Constitution in 2017.

connections to opposition groups and activists, as well as his alliance with the ANDM,<sup>5</sup> significantly helped garner the political capital required to afford him the dominance. The once all-powerful Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), that engineered the establishment of EPDRF and which had a dominant say in the party for the preceding 27 years, was effectively toppled from its preeminent position.

The South African case is different, mainly because the ANC and the party's elites have always held a strong position *vis-à-vis* the President. Resignation of presidents is not a new phenomenon in the country. Jacob Zuma is the second one to step down, after his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, faced the same fate in 2008, following allegations that he had used the country's law enforcement system to undermine Zuma's chances of succession (Lindow, 2008).

### Social Media Based Political Participation

Individual or collective action to improve the well-being of communities or nations has always taken place in the history of mankind. But the forms and orientations of such movements have been dynamic, mainly depending on the values of the time, the sophistication of the society in case, and the kind of issues demanding change. Recently, such movements have been widely depicted as being, among other things, more personalized, typically involving communication technologies and conducted among loosely connected people. Moreover, as Benett (2012) noted, the identity politics that arose after the 1960s - centering on group identity (women, minorities, immigrants, and native people) or causes (anti-nuclear, environmental conservation, and specific rights) - are continuously becoming eroded and being replaced by issues like economic justice, environmental protection, war and peace, *inter alia*.

The youth, of course, are at the center of this process. From those that spearheaded the Arab Spring to the participants in the Occupy Movement and *indignados*, they are relentlessly engaged in championing their causes. However, a closer look shows that the current trend in youth civic engagement is less politically inclined and more interested in personalized choices of a 'Do-It-Yourself (DYI)' nature.

According to the European Social Survey, in 2010, 61% of young respondents aged 22-29 stated that they voted in the last national elections, as opposed to the 78.1% of over 30-year-olds (EC, 2010). Political engagement on conventional platforms reached its peak in the 1970s in the US, and has been trending downward ever since (Theocharis, 2014). In Africa, an *Afrobarometer's* study in 2016 showed that 65% of its respondents aged 18 to 35 years voted in last national election, compared to 79% of citizens above the age of 35 (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi, 2016).

Social media is undoubtedly changing the political arena of the African continent. Dominant political parties are infamous for controlling the countries' main mass media to convey their ideologies and policies to citizens (Doorenspleet and Nijzink, 2013). By doing so, they control the agenda and the way information is transmitted. As a result, national mass media corporations are less accommodative of opposition groups, who already face the problem of meagre resources to promote their agendas.

With the advent of social media, the broadening of telecom infrastructures, and the rise of savvy youths, governments are finding it difficult to control the flow of information. Faced with a regime that is not ready to entertain different viewpoints, dominant political discourses have shifted to the internet and social media platforms. The internet is also increasingly used

5 ANDM: The Amhara National Democratic Movement is one of the parties that makes up EPDRF. It represents the 27-million-strong Amhara ethnic group of Ethiopia.

for active political participation in the form of protests. Facebook and Twitter have made it easy for the youth to organize and execute protests. Yet, African governments in general do not seem to be ready for social media take over communications. While some responded by blocking the internet altogether, others are introducing social media taxes (VOA, 2018).

It is in the nature of internet-based activism that participants are often loosely organized, allowing individuals who have not seen each other before to stand together for the same cause. These individuals might also not belong to a specific political party or share the same ideology fully. Their association is based on a certain cause, catered to them via the internet. In this scenario, the old tactic by which dominant parties target political parties and micromanage their members seems to be irrelevant. Even without political parties organizing them, individuals (mainly activists) are the ones who take the initiative to advance causes and bring others on board.

The reach of social media goes beyond national coverage. With simple promotion mechanisms, it affords the opportunity to publicize a cause to millions on the internet. This damage the reputation of the incumbent heads-of-state and party, and disables it from denying or massively cracking down the protests. Social-media-based movements in Africa, such as the #OromoProtests, in Ethiopia, and #ThisFlag, in Zimbabwe, have shown the effectiveness of social-media-based political participation against repressive regimes. Lasting for a whole two years between 2015 and 2017 and mainly led by Oromo activists based abroad, the #OromoProtests movement managed to mobilize millions of Oromo youths in both peaceful and, at times, violent protests. The movement mainly utilized Facebook and was able to raise awareness about itself and mobilize the youth for action. The two years of relentless engagement finally managed to bring one of Africa's strongest governments to its knees and set the stage for an intra-party negotiation, leading to the election of an Oromo prime minister for the first time in the country's history.

The youth in Zimbabwe have also employed social media to stand up against Mugabe, specifically Facebook and Twitter for the sharing of information. Mobilization was largely conducted through WhatsApp, calling the youth to street protests. The #ThisFlag movement, started by Evan Mawarire (a pastor in profession) on Facebook, created a breakthrough for Zimbabwe's social-media-based protest movement. Hundreds of thousands of young people participated in the online movement, creating the momentum for the army's intervention to oust Mugabe.

Nevertheless, one of the downsides of social-media-based activism is its failure to rely on institutionalization. Movements tend to wither away when their calls for actions are responded to. It might be precisely because of this nature that governments are ready to make concessions in the form of leadership resignations. When leaders resign, protestors will be appeased, thereby halting the momentum of the social-media-based movements. The successor follows up to introduce a few more changes, resetting as a reformist. While the entire situation gives an illusion of transformation, it ultimately leaves the party's dominance intact.

### Youthful Population

Around 60% of the population in Africa is below 25 years of age. The median age of the continent is nineteen years. Whereas Africa's youth bulge could possibly unlock the continent's development potentials by maximizing the demographic dividend, African governments seem to be ill-prepared to cater to the demands of this portion of the population. UNECA (2017) reports that youth unemployment in Africa is up to three times higher than adult employment. In addition, young Africans with a higher education are two or three times more likely to be unemployed than those with primary education, in contrast to those in high-income countries (*ibid*). Of the 450 million youth aged 15 to 35 years, one third is unemployed,

another one third is vulnerably employed, and only one sixth is in waged employment (*ibid*). 90% of Africa's youth live in low and lower-middle income countries, and the biggest challenge they face is the lack of formal jobs (*ibid*).

Statistics indicate that African economies have failed to create both the quantity and quality of jobs required by its youth. The structural transformation of economies seems to be the only way the continent could create the opportunities the youth eagerly await, given how relying on the production and export of unprocessed natural resources is not enough to cater to their employment demands. However, that has proven to be easier said than done, and there are currently numerous factors hampering the continent from such a revamping.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is the most plausible option for the continent to foster its move to industrialization. However, even with a large work force and relatively cheaper labour cost, Africa is not able to attract as much FDI from international investors. Among the reasons that lead to this are the peace and security challenges the continent faces, thus posing imminent risk to any investment. Moreover, infrastructural challenges – including the inadequate provision of transport, energy and communication – is another hurdle discouraging FDI. Finally, bureaucratic complications and associated ill-governance, including corruption, ensure Africa to be less attractive to global investors.

The demographic pressure ultimately reflects itself in politics and governance. As the number of unemployed youths rises, so does political instability. Unfortunately, the provision of jobs to the youth seem to require the implementation of years of effective development programs. The impact of unemployment on political stability, however, has already started to manifest itself.

Unemployment positions the youth in at least two compromising situations. Firstly, they grow to be more and more frustrated, thus willing to protest frequently. The risk of protesting and engaging in escalated disobedience and violence is much higher. Secondly, they also become readily mobilised by activists and patronizing networks that usually operate to support political elites and economic heavyweights. Many are easily swayed into becoming foot soldiers for local activists who manipulate them into undermining political processes.

Social media and the doors they open for political participation have largely benefitted the youth, as they are the ones that have the savvy to utilize the platforms to the fullest. The existence of internet-based activism has made it all too easy for a manner of political participation that can also take the form of protests. From the youth of South Africa to those in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, they have all stood against regimes and leaders in the past few years and raised fundamental political and economic grievances.

### **Resignations and Democracy**

The head-of-state resignations in the past few years depicts a glimmer of hope among the African citizenry, implying that countries under dominant political parties have started to hear the concerns of their peoples. The fact that, in all the countries under consideration, the resignation had a calming effect on the protests is a testament to this. But resignation does not necessarily guarantee a shift to democracy. For dominant parties to uplift this trend of resignation to long lasting democracy, there should be tangible shifts in the rule of law, separation of power, strong opposition, and free media.

Institutionalization seems to be the key in this process. Protection from authoritarianism can only be guaranteed if there are democratic institutions that can protect rights and assure the rule of law. New leaders that attained power following the resignations need to work on this. Unless there are clear signs of dominant parties building such institutions, these renunciations will only serve as new strategies for old regimes to retain power.

The resignation in Ethiopia, for instance, despite having shown initial promising signs, eventually redirected its path and led the country to weaker security and an even tighter political space. One of the reasons for this is the lack of institutionalization in the reforms conducted in the aftermath of the resignation process the country went through. Two years afterwards, Ethiopia finds itself once again in a compromising situation with a fractured government. With elections scheduled for 2020 now suspended due to Covid-19 concerns,<sup>6</sup> the political situation could readily worsen. One of the reasons for this is the inadequate inclusion of political institutions in guiding the post-resignation period in Ethiopia. The incumbent political party, which changed leaders following popular protests, presented itself as the legitimate body to guide the country through the reforms. Unfortunately, it can now be fairly assessed the incumbent has failed to fully realize the public demands that initiated the change. The inadequate inclusion of the institutions in the entire process has resulted in waning public support to the reforms, further pushing the country to an insecure and unstable setting.

Leaders in Africa need to recognize that they do not have the comfort of the 1970s East Asian countries, wherein economies were pushed to fast growth at the expense of democracy. The current African reality demands that states attend to both democracy and economic development simultaneously. Indeed, times have changed; ways of social mobilization, protests and political participation have become more digitalized and less ideologically oriented. This means that citizens are more prone to protest on issues with effects at an individual level, but also shared by many as a group. The only sense of commonality that needs to exist might be the zeal to voice that issue out as a concern. In the African scenario, given the population dynamics, there is little doubt that the next few years will witness more calls for employment and expanded political space by the youth. This requires not only ingenious but also genuine effort by governments to respond to the economic and political questions of their youth.

This is expected to be a slow and frustrating process for the younger section of the population. Not only African states are yet to have the infrastructure that enable them to compete globally in attracting FDI, in order to potentially employ more people; there are also security issues in many African states that leave them unattractive for investors. In such a setting, youth could potentially call for changes and better governance. Resignations might, of course, serve as a potential ingenious move by incumbents to at least avoid violence and protracted protests. However, the concern is more structural, and requires genuine efforts by incumbents to govern better, create jobs, and guarantee its citizens the benefits guaranteed to them.

The Rwandan and Ethiopia development-led approach saw a promising result in terms of sustaining continuous growth for years that managed to pull millions out of poverty. However, the records of the two governments with regard to democracy is a dismal one. Interestingly, the approaches of the two governments in maintaining power is also different. Whereas the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, resorted to amending the constitution to extend his term, Ethiopia's EPDRF saw its Prime Minister resign. Given the fact that third-termism, a strategy that enables a leader to remain in power beyond a term limit, is a calculated move to pass

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<sup>6</sup> While the federal government claimed that, due to Covid-19, it is impossible to conduct elections in the country, thus pursuing a constitutional amendment procedure to extend its own term-limit beyond the five years specified by the constitution, the opposition is calling for a "care-taker" government to be set up until elections are conducted. The opposition argues that a constitutional amendment to extend term limits, when the constitution is clear in stating there is no way to power other than elections, is a flagrant violation of the law and a regress to autocracy. Moreover, Tigray's regional government and the regional parliament have opted to conduct elections in the regional state, compromising the federal government's stance.

constitutional requirements of term limits, Kagame's strong grip on the politics of Rwanda and his expectation to only meet manageable protest that can easily be squashed were made clear. On the other hand, resignations are undertaken when dominant parties face popular protest that compromises their rule and strict grip on power. Thus, it is a response to their diminishing popular support that allows them to rebrand themselves and maintain their dominance.

## Conclusion

One-party dominated states in Africa have existed since the African countries' independence. Following the third wave of democratization in the 1990s, these parties employed different strategies to keep their dominance intact, including diminishing political spaces through the oppression of opposition voices and the use of state resources to buy off loyalties. However, recent developments in the continent have totally altered the political environment. The rise of new elites, internet-based political participation, and a youthful population have made old strategies irrelevant.

Dominant parties seem to adapt to the changing times. Leadership resignation appears to be a calculated approach by some parties to appease growing frustration and protests. Resignations are mostly associated with change and reform, giving the impression of a new system in place. This impression calms down protests and gives hope to the citizenry, albeit leaving the party's dominance unaltered.

In a continent where amending constitutions to extend head-of-state term limits is a trend, resignation appears to be a positive move. However, it is far from being a democratic practice. For democracy to set its roots in the continent, institutional and personal freedoms and rights must be respected, courts need to remain free from political influence, and a proper space for media and civil society must exist. Without the institutionalization of these fundamental attributes of democracy, resignation by itself will only be another strategy of maintaining dominance.

Actions in post-resignation periods - which include freeing political prisoners and broadening the political space - suggest a better approach towards the right direction. Post-resignation periods can only be regarded as transition periods towards fair elections, where the voices and concerns that had the need for resignations are attended to in an institutionalized manner. Other arrangements short of this can only be regarded as a political ploy that plan to extend dominance through an illusion of change.

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# Discussing gender issues in indigenous social movements in Brazil: An overview of the current challenges to the realization of indigenous women's right

**Luiza Nunes de Lima,**<sup>1</sup> University of Southeastern Norway

**Abstract:** To this day, indigenous peoples all over the world face racial and cultural discrimination. Their individual and collective human rights are continually disrespected as a consequence of the colonial processes that still shape our society. The situation is even more serious for those who stand in an intersectional position, such as Brazil's indigenous women. Discussing gender issues is not an easy task for these women, who could benefit from adopting non-mainstream types of feminism, which could them add their gender-based demands to the indigenous social movements' agenda.

**Keywords:** indigenous women, gender, decoloniality, intersectionality, social movements.

## Introduction

To this day, indigenous peoples from all over the world face discrimination and have their human rights, especially their collective rights, disrespected as a consequence of the colonial process. Even though international human rights law encompasses several Conventions and Declarations protecting indigenous minority groups - such as Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - they still struggle to have their fundamental rights and cultural specificities respected. This difficulty is a result of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), which maintains the colonial racialized social structure and the economic and cultural dependency of ex-colonized territories even after their political independence from European centers (culminated by the end of colonialism).

Since 1500, when the first Europeans arrived in what is now Brazil, local native peoples have faced threats of all kinds. The country's Federal Constitution of 1988 guaranteed some improvements, at least on paper, as national policies were developed to try to ensure indigenous legal rights. The Brazilian state has hitherto recognized these peoples as national minorities, entitled to specific group rights. However, the reality faced by these communities is far from ideal, especially since 2019. Jair Bolsonaro, the national president elected in 2018, has been attacking such groups and their constitutional prerogatives from his first day in office as head of the Brazilian federal government. It goes to show that having national policies is not always enough to secure indigenous peoples their liberties and how, therefore, they must mobilize to keep what has been achieved thus far.

While Brazilian indigenous peoples face numerous obstacles like poverty and violence, the situation is even worse for indigenous women, who are simultaneously members of two

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<sup>1</sup> Luiza Nunes de Lima has a bachelor's degree in journalism and a lato sensu specialization in Strategic Communication from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (PUC-Minas), Brazil. Currently, she is doing her master's degree in Human Rights and Multiculturalism at the University of Southeastern Norway (USN), Norway, in which she is developing research in the field of Decolonial Studies and Indigenous Women.

subaltern groups. They suffer from both racism and sexism, reinforcing the need to adopt an intersectional approach that “addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression, and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like” (Yuval-Davis, 2009: 48) when analyzing their situation. Discussing gender issues, however, is not easy for indigenous women, given that indigenous societies possess several differences from our own when it comes to social structures and traditions. As an alternative, it might be a good tactic to adopt feminism as a strategy for including gender debates in indigenous peoples’ social movements’ broader agenda. It should not be mainstream or Western feminism, however, seen as these respond “to the needs of women in those societies, who carry out struggles and articulate theoretical constructions in an attempt to explain their situation of subordination” (Paredes, 2015: 18) while ignoring other specific realities and contributions.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first one presents an overview of indigenous peoples’ situation around the world, employing a decolonial theoretical perspective. The second addresses the history of indigenous rights within the international human rights system. The third introduces the unique circumstances of indigenous peoples in Brazil and the emergence of indigenous social movements. Finally, the fourth section analyzes how indigenous women understand and discuss gender issues and how they can organize and assemble so as to add their claims to the general agenda of indigenous social movements.

### **Indigenous Peoples’ Situation in the World: a Decolonial Analysis**

In 1492, the first European invaders arrived in the region known today as the Americas. Since then, the continents’ original inhabitants have been systematically oppressed, discriminated, subjugated, excluded, and exterminated as a result of the colonial process initiated during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Even with the end of what Aníbal Quijano (2007: 168) calls Eurocentered colonialism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in most parts of the world, the colonial model of dominance has not entirely disappeared. As Ania Loomba explains, “a country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time” (Loomba, 2005: 12). For Quijano, one of the founders of the decolonial school of thought, the presence of colonial dominance even after the ex-colonies’ independence is explained by the *coloniality of power* (Quijano, 2000). To understand how such a process has affected the lives of indigenous peoples, it is important to define what colonialism and the coloniality of power are, and to clarify how these terms have different but interrelated meanings.

In a broad definition, colonialism is “a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another” (Kohn and Reddy, 2017). Contrary to the widespread opinion on the subject, colonialism is not a modern phenomenon, nor is it restricted to a specific time or place. “World history is full of examples of one society gradually expanding by incorporating adjacent territory and settling its people on newly conquered territory” (Kohn and Reddy, 2017). As Loomba explains, although colonialism was not identical in the different parts of the world it occurred, “it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history” (Loomba 2005: 7-8). In Loomba’s words, “the process of ‘forming a community’ in the new land necessarily meant un-forming or re-forming the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions” (*ibid*:8). From the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, Europeans were able to access more remote parts of the world due to technological developments in navigation, which represented an essential advancement in their colonization attempts. “Thus, the modern European colonial project

emerged when it became possible to move large numbers of people across the ocean and to maintain political sovereignty in spite of geographical dispersion” (Kohn and Reddy, 2017).

Colonialism was a part of human history long before the European expeditions at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. “The ancient Greeks set up colonies as did the Romans, the Moors, and the Ottomans, to name just a few of the most famous examples” (Kohn and Reddy, 2017). However, modern colonialism was different from the previous forms of colonialism because it “was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe” (Loomba, 2005: 9). According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018), it consisted of a new form of domination, given that it was based on the ontological degradation of the dominated populations for *ethnoracial* reasons. In that sense, when America emerged at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, two entirely new experiences would transpire jointly with it: that of world capitalism, and the concept of race (Quijano, 2000: 216).

According to Ramón Grosfoguel, “the superiority of the Westerners/Europeans over non-Europeans in terms of a racial narrative of superior/inferior peoples was constructed in this period” (Grosfoguel, 2002: 210). In the words of Quijano, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Europeans inaugurated a “new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations: the idea of race, as biologically structural and hierarchical differences between the dominant and dominated” (Quijano, 2000: 216). The concept of race - and the dissemination of the idea of a superior and more advanced European one - would then be used to justify the process of domination and colonization of the “new peoples”.

So race (biology and culture or, in our present terms, race and ethnicity) was placed as one of the basic criteria to classify the population in the power structure of the new society, associated with the nature of roles and places in the division of labor and in the control of resources of production. (Quijano, 2000: 216)

The racial classification of world populations would also be used to explain the division of work and the accumulation of resources and capital (Quijano, 2000): indigenous and other non-European peoples (inferior races) would become slaves and/or serfs, while Europeans (superior race) would receive money for their work and/or would become the owners of the resources and capital. “For Quijano, racism is constitutive and entangled with the international division of labor and capitalist accumulation on a world scale” (Grosfoguel, 2002: 220). The colonized peoples’ racialization (and, therefore, the hierarchization of Europeans as superior and non-Europeans as inferior) and the international division and control of both labor and resources based on this racialization process is defined by Quijano (2007) as one of the central pillars of coloniality of power. As the author explains,

coloniality of power is based upon ‘racial’ social classification of the world population under Eurocentered world power. But coloniality of power is not exhausted in the problem of ‘racist’ social relations. It pervaded and modulated the basic instances of the Eurocentered capitalist colonial/modern world power to become the cornerstone of this coloniality of power. (Quijano, 2007: 171)

Eurocentered colonialism may have come to an end after the political independence of the colonized countries as they emerged as modern nation-states, but coloniality of power still remains as an active mechanism in such places. “Although colonial administrations have been almost entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organized into nation-states, non-European people are still living under crude European-Euro-American exploitation and domination” (Grosfoguel, 2002: 205). In this context, the coloniality of power is related to the “continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations” (*ibid*: 205). As Quijano explains, “coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed” (Quijano, 2007: 170). This continuity can be explained by the “European paradigm of rational

knowledge” (Quijano, 2007: 174), built as a part of the power structure of the European colonial domination over the rest of the world. The domination process was achieved by imposing the idea that only European culture and knowledge were valid. “The strong belief that their knowledge covered the totality of the known brought about the need to devalue, diminish, and shut off any other totality that might endanger an epistemic totalitarianism in the making” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 195). In the words of the authors,

As a matrix of power, coloniality came to operate in Abya Yala, and subsequently elsewhere, in multiple spheres, exercising control over humanity, subjectivity and being, gender and sexuality, spirituality, knowledge production, economy, nature, existence and life itself. Coloniality, in this sense, involves and affects us all. (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 23)

The position of racial, social, and epistemic inferiority attributed to non-European peoples by modern colonizers created what Mignolo defines as *colonial difference* (2005: 386), which transformed non-European peoples like indigenous communities into subalterns. According to Mignolo, “subaltern is not just a category that affects given sectors of the population of one single nation-state, but a category of the imperial and modern/colonial world that affects people and regions in a global distribution of wealth and meaning” (Mignolo, 2005: 386). According to Quijano, the colonized territories’ political independence and the consequent creation of nation-states, especially in Latin America, did not end their historical-structural dependency on European colonizers. Therefore, it did not “lead to the development” and democratization of the ex-colonies (Quijano 2016, p.12). For the author, this dependency - explained by the coloniality of power - led the colonial white minorities to identify with European interests after they had assumed power in the newly inaugurated nation-states. As Quijano and Ennis explain,

Their social interests were explicitly antagonistic to American Indian serfs and black slaves, given that their privileges were made from precisely the dominance and exploitation of those peoples in such a way that there was no area of common interest between whites and nonwhites and, consequently, no common national interest for all of them. Therefore, from the point of view of the dominators, their social interests were much closer to the interests of their European peers, and consequently they were always inclined to follow the interests of the European bourgeoisie. They were, then, dependent. (Quijano and Ennis, 2000: 566)

In Grosfoguel’s words, what happened “was not a process of social, political, cultural, or economic decolonization. Blacks, mulattos, Native Americans, and people of color remained in subordinated and disenfranchised positions in the coloniality of power constitutive of the emerging nation-states” (Grosfoguel 2002: 212). Instead, “colonialism gave way to coloniality, that is, independence without decolonization. (*ibid*: 212).

For Mignolo and Walsh (2018: 144), knowledge is coloniality of power’s most valuable domain, given that it controls the content and terms of the conversation and thus has full authority over the enunciated and the enunciation. Colonizers were able to maintain their power over the colonized through the notion of European knowledge’s superiority. “Modern epistemology produced not only a way of building knowledge but promoted ways of life, established what is right or wrong, defined the forms, contents and values for the colonized peoples’ daily lives” (Almeida e Silva 2015: 52). In that sense, Santos (2016: 118) defines modern Western thinking as *abyssal thinking*, which

consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The invisible distinctions are established through radical lines that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of “this side of the line” and the realm of “the other side of the line.” The division is such that “the other side of the line” vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. (Santos, 2016: 118)

In this theoretical framework, the colonized appear as the “other side of the line”, the nonexistent - that is, none of the knowledge they produce (e.g. indigenous practices and beliefs) is deemed to be valid, not even considered to *be* knowledge since not reaching and/or respecting “scientific” methods and/or standards. Santos (2016: 124) argues that this abyssal line directly connects global social injustice to global cognitive injustice, a scenario that can only be overcome through post-abyssal thinking, something which “involves a radical break with modern Western ways of thinking and acting (2016: 134). As for Quijano, the author argues for a decolonial way of thinking to destroy the coloniality of power. “First of all, epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality” (Quijano, 2007: 177). For Mignolo, “decoloniality requires epistemic disobedience, for border thinking is by definition thinking in exteriority, in the spaces and time that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of coloniality” (Mignolo, 2011: 282). Thus, Santos argues in favor of the ecology of knowledge as a counter-epistemology.

The ecology of knowledges aims to create a new kind of relation, a pragmatic relation, between scientific knowledge and other kinds of knowledge. It consists of granting “equality of opportunity” to the different kinds of knowledge involved in ever broader epistemological arguments with a view to maximizing their respective contributions toward building “another possible world,” that is to say, a more just and democratic society, as well as one more balanced in its relations with nature. (Santos, 2016: 190)

## Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples’ Rights

Given the context presented above, it is possible to comprehend why it was only by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that indigenous peoples’ issues became an international subject of concern. Put bluntly, the Western world simply did not care about them, given they had been placed in a subaltern position since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and had thus become invisible (Mignolo, 2005: 388). The first international document guaranteeing indigenous peoples specific rights was the Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries n° 107, from the International Labor Organization (ILO), adopted in 1957. According to Lee Swepston (1998: 18), the ILO was established in 1919, following the end of World War I, as a direct result of that conflict. While the League of Nations was responsible for keeping the political and military peace, ILO’s role was to maintain social peace. “The principal method employed by the ILO in its fight for social justice was, and continues to be, the adoption and supervision of international conventions” (*ibid*: 18).

For Alexandra Xanthaki, the binding nature of the 1957 Convention was its most relevant aspect, since “its provisions established for the first time in international law specific state obligations towards indigenous peoples” (Xanthaki 2007: 50). Nonetheless, Convention 107 failed to include indigenous populations in the decision-making process about their future and other matters that affected them. “The adoption of the 1957 Convention was a significant step forward in projecting the views and aspirations of the indigenous peoples. The Convention, however, was a product of its time, with a considerable imprint of an assimilationist ideology” (Rehman, 2010: 484).

The lack of indigenous participation in the construction of Convention 107 and its paternalistic approach would motivate its revision and the adoption, in 1989, of the 169 Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. This document is also binding for the 23 countries that have ratified it (as of December 2019). It “recognizes the presence of indigenous peoples, their historicity and cultural indelibility. It

evinces respect for their societies, their characteristic modes of existence and holistic social constructs, and is characterized by the affirmation of collective as well as individual rights” (Thornberry, 2002: 520 *apud* May 2012: 290). The major distinction between Convention 107 and ILO’s Convention 169 is that, “whereas the earlier Convention presumed the eventual disappearance of indigenous and tribal populations as they were gradually integrated into the countries in which they live, the 1989 instrument adopted an attitude of respect for the cultures and ways of life of these people” (Swepston, 1998: 23).

The 1989 Convention is a reflection of a more liberal attitude and biased against hitherto prevalent integrationist and assimilation orientations; its moderating effect on what, according to its preamble, were ‘the assimilationist orientation of the earlier standards’ is worthy of appreciation. (Rehman, 2010: 485)

It took even longer for the United Nations (UN) System and the International Human Rights Law to address indigenous peoples’ issues. In fact, indigenous peoples’ rights only became part of the UN’s agenda in the final two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This can be partly explained by the nature of the notion itself. The concept of contemporary human rights was developed after the end of World War II with the creation of the United Nations in 1945; it “includes classical civil and political rights, social, economic and cultural rights and group or peoples’ rights” (Rehman, 2010: 77). The creation of the UN and the adoption of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights form the International Bill of Human Rights, “brought about a radical change to the ideological bases of international law” (Rehman, 2010: 4). Traditionally, international law refers to the law “that regulates relations between independent and sovereign states” (*ibid*: 17). International human rights law, however, regulates the relations between States and individual human beings and “acknowledges the sovereignty of man” (Alston *et al.*, 2013: 145).

Human rights treaties are not multilateral treaties of the traditional type concluded to accomplish the reciprocal exchange of rights for the mutual benefit of concluding states. Their object and purpose is the protection of the basic rights of individual human beings, irrespective of their nationality, both against the State of their nationality and all other contracting States. (Rehman, 2010: 14)

The International Human Rights law brought about significant change for protecting human beings against state-committed abuses. Nevertheless, the law was originally conceived to safeguard individual rights by “adopting the concept of equality for all, in place of the idea of protection of minorities” (Smith, 2010: 27). In this respect, “the issue of minority rights has remained peripheral to human rights notwithstanding the fact that often individuals are victimized or discriminated against because they belong to a particular ethnic, racial, religious, social or political group” (Rehman, 2010: 11).

According to Will Kymlicka (1995), after World War II ended and both the UN and human rights were created, most liberal democracies assumed that “where these individual rights [human rights] are firmly protected, no further rights needed to be attributed to the members of specific ethnic or national minorities” (Kymlicka, 1995: 3). This is not to say, however, that liberal democracies were unaware of how contemporary societies are characterized by great ethnic diversity and cultural plurality. It means, according to Kymlicka (2002: 327), that contemporary nation-states initially chose to ignore this diversity and deal with it through the marginalization and/or assimilation of divergent citizens and groups. This was the case of indigenous peoples in most Western countries, according to Stephen May (2012: 287-288).

Things started to change during the final two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Will Kymlicka and Keith Banting (2006: 1) highlight, Western democracies then began to adopt “an accommodation approach to diversity”, led by the disadvantaged ethnocultural groups’

questioning of “the lingering manifestations of ethnic and racial hierarchy” (*ibid*, 2006: 9) - inspired, in turn, by human rights ideals. The result of this shift - from an assimilationist approach to an accommodating one, in face of diversity - was the adoption of multiculturalism policies for minority groups by most Western democracies. Such policies “extend some level of public recognition and support for ethnocultural minorities to maintain and express their distinct identities and practices (Kymlicka and Banting, 2006: 1).

The change in the perception regarding the need for minority group rights outgrew national borders and was eventually translated into certain international legal instruments. In that sense, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution 47/135 of December 18 1992, was the first tool adopted at a global level for minorities’ protection. “The Declaration represents a concerted effort on the part of the international community to overcome some of the limitations in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)” (Rehman, 2010: 457). The Declaration became the leading provision for dealing with these groups’ prerogatives. While Article 27 of the ICCPR states the rights of persons belonging to minority groups, the Declaration “shows that the majority of states accepts that the individual character of minority rights entails duties of the state to protect the group as a whole because the group is formed by persons entitled with minority rights” (Kugelmann, 2007: 244).

Indigenous peoples and other national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities share some characteristics since “both groups are usually in a non-dominant position in the society in which they live and their cultures, languages or religious beliefs may be different from the majority or the dominant groups” (UN, 2010a: 4). However, native peoples differentiate themselves from other minority groups because, in addition to having their right to exist as a group respected, their identity recognized, their participation in public life legitimized, and their cultural, religious and linguistic pluralism safeguarded, they also “traditionally advocated recognition of their rights over land and resources, self-determination and being part of decision-making in matters that affect them” (*ibid*: 4). International instruments were specially developed to safeguard indigenous peoples’ rights because they are a different type of minority group and, accordingly, possess specific issues of concern.

The fundamental matter when dealing with indigenous peoples’ rights is their demand for self-determination. According to Erica-Irene A. Daes, “the right of peoples and nations to self-determination is a fundamental human right (United Nations [UN] General Assembly [GA] 1950) and a prerequisite to the full enjoyment of all fundamental human rights (UN GA 1952)” (Daes 2008: 7). The first international document to address this subject was the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries (1960), which states that “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (UN, 1960). Later, in 1966, when the UN was formulating the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the liberty to self-determination was declared a liberty of all peoples (Article 1 of both Covenants). Nevertheless, as Daes explains, at the time “a great number of states fearing secession” did “not accept that indigenous peoples are qualified to exercise their right to self-determination” (Daes 2008: 11). This led to the elaboration of the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States (1970), a document that would safeguard state sovereignty against any thoughts of or attempts at secession which might arise based on the self-determination prerogative.

The first time the UN officially recognized the need for specifically addressing indigenous peoples’ issues (including their self-determination rights) was in 1982, with the creation of the



Working Group on Indigenous Populations. “Unlike other United Nations bodies, where participation is restricted to nongovernmental organizations holding consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, the Working Group decided to allow all indigenous representatives the possibility of addressing the meeting” (Burger, 1998: 4). This measure contributed significantly to broadening and strengthening the discussion on indigenous peoples’ worldwide struggles. In 1993, the Working Group completed the first draft of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. Subsequently, the Commission on Human Rights created a new working group to review the draft Declaration, since “there were signs of profound disagreement about the text between indigenous peoples and governments, as well as among the governments themselves” (*ibid.*: 10). According to Karen Engle, “much of the controversy throughout negotiations regarding the draft and the final declaration revolved around Article 3” (Engle 2011: 144), which addressed self-determination.<sup>2</sup>

The adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP) would only become a reality in 2007, after more than 25 years of debating. At that time, 143 countries voted in favor of the Declaration. It is currently considered by the UN to be “the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of indigenous peoples. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world [...]” (UN, 2019a). Furthermore, the Declaration is the first human rights instrument that recognizes groups, and not only individuals, as rights holders (Stavenhagen, 2011: 161) - a considerable shift for the understanding and application of human rights laws.

Engle (2011), however, highlights that the 2007 Declaration compromises significantly with the scope of indigenous rights. For instance, the document states that “the right to self-determination guarantees ‘the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions’” (Engle, 2011: 145). In practice, this means that “external forms of self-determination are off the table for indigenous peoples, and human rights will largely provide the model for economic and political justice for indigenous peoples” (*ibid.*: 146). As the author explains,

[...] on one hand, the UNDRIP challenges or at least pushes the liberal human rights paradigm by explicitly referring to the right to self-determination, embracing collective rights, and expressing an understanding of the interrelationship between rights to heritage, land, and development. On the other hand, it represents the continued power and persistence of an international human rights paradigm that eschews strong forms of indigenous self-determination and privileges individual civil and political rights. In this sense, I contend that the UNDRIP signifies both the possible expansion and continued limitation of human rights and the perpetuation of certain biases, including the suggestion that cultural rights – particularly in their collective form – are outside the domain of human rights. (Engle, 2011: 142)

In the last 30 years, international concern about indigenous peoples and their liberties has increased, as evidenced by the development of international conventions and standards. However, the reality of indigenous peoples around the world is different from what is preached in international Conventions and Declarations. For instance, according to the report *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples* (UN, 2010b), native peoples represent approximately 370 million, or 5%, of the world’s population; however, they also consist of 15% of the world’s poorest and one-third of the world’s 900 million extremely poor rural people. They also face extremely unfair conditions when it comes to land rights, education, and health. This scenario

2 “United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These four states as well as many other countries along the way expressed concern that the right to self-determination might be read to include the right to statehood”. (Engle 2011: 145)

indicates that the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) still operates around the world, and that colonial difference (Mignolo, 2011) remains very much alive.

## Indigenous Peoples: the Brazilian context

The situation of indigenous peoples in Brazil is not much different from what is seen around the world. Even though Brazil ratified Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2002 and was one of the countries voting in favor of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, native Brazilian peoples have continuously been under threat and face many challenges in having their human rights acknowledged and respected. This situation can be partly explained by the nature of international human rights law itself and its limitations.

The nature of international law demands the goodwill of States to secure implementation of standards of human rights. Consequently, it is open to States to pick and choose which parts, if any, of a particular instrument they accept. Changes in government and stability may prompt States to derogate from an instrument or even to denounce it completely. Moreover, there may be a degree of State discretion inherent in the operation of human rights instruments - a recognition that the rights are not absolute and may be limited to an extent depending on situations of national security, politics, morality, or health. (Smith, 2010: 177)

International human rights instruments can also be limited by each state's national legal system. "Phrases such as 'as far as possible', 'in accordance with national law', and 'as necessary' indicate a degree of flexibility" (Smith, 2010: 177) to these tools. One way to overcome such hindrances, at least in theory, would be the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights by the national legal system as well. "The heart of the matter lies with domestic implementation. If an instrument is incorporated into national law, then it stands a much greater chance of being enforced in that State, as the State will explicitly have endorsed its content" (*ibid*: 172). In that sense, the situation of Brazilian indigenous peoples should be close to ideal, given that the Brazilian state has ratified and approved the main international legal instrument on indigenous peoples' rights and also recognizes them in the 1988 Federal Constitution. However, reality is far more complicated.

Brazil was one of the territories colonized by (Portuguese) European explorers from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, it was a part of the colonial project that built the modern capitalist world system. Consequently, the native peoples who inhabited the invaded Brazilian territories were victims of the same racialization process that is constitutive to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), and that classifies non-European peoples as inferior. "The idea of race, as biologically structural and hierarchical differences between the dominant and dominated" (Quijano, 2000: 216), would have been used to justify and naturalize the domination process and the exploitation of native peoples' labor.

Since the beginning of the colonial project, Portugal developed an *indigenist* policy<sup>3</sup> that would, overall, serve the interests of the Portuguese Crown and the Portuguese settlers. The policy divided indigenous peoples into Portugal's allies and enemies, which in turn guided the implementation (or lack thereof) of a colonial legislation on indigenous groups. "There was an immensity of colonial legislation regarding local and indigenous issues, as well as directed at establishing general rights (freedom, labor, etc.). Such legislation changed its dispositions as

3 The term indigenist policy "specifically refers to acts in benefit of Native Brazilian peoples causing deep impact on their lifestyle and everyday life" conducted by non-indigenous actors such as governments and non-governmental organizations, among others. (Povos Indígenas no Brasil, 2018)

the indigenous were allies or enemies of the Portuguese” (Oliveira and Freire 2006: 36). The general aim, however, was the same: to catechize indigenous peoples, both the allies and enemies, and prepare them to serve as a labor force for the colonial project. In that sense, “Papal Bulls, Letters, and Regal Permits [...] were ignored by the administrators and individuals who held local powers, by acting in their own best interests or giving in under pressure from the (white) residents of the colonies” (*ibid*: 35-36).

The debate around indigenous peoples’ rights, freedom, and sovereignty over their lands had been on the agenda since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The prevalent legal position has tended to be in the indigenous peoples’ favor (Cunha, 1987: 55-56). For instance, in 1537, Pope Paul III published the first Papal Bull against the enslavement of the American indigenous peoples and recognized their rights over their respective territories, a position also adopted in the Portuguese laws for the Brazilian colony. However, this “consists in, as is well known, a *de jure* recognition that a thousand stratagems try to circumvent in practice; but such legal recognition at least shows the Crown’s conscience, and bad conscience, about indigenous rights” (Cunha, 1987: 58).

From the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until Brazil’s Declaration of Independence in 1822, many laws, royal charters, permits, and Papal Bulls concerning Brazilian indigenous peoples were created (Jancsó *et al.*, 1994). While some would abolish the enslavement of indigenous peoples, others would permit it once again. This situation continued until 1831, when a new law - the Law of October 27, 1831 - was proclaimed and abolished indigenous peoples’ enslavement once and for all.

Therefore, the system of terror and persecution was formally rejected by the legislator; the captivity or even temporary bondage of the Indians, still in the past tense, was abolished once and for all; they were equated with orphans and placed under the protection of their Judges; supported by the Treasury as long as they needed it; and finally, Judges of Peace in their respective districts were made responsible for defending and guarding these same Indians’ freedom. (Malheiros, 1867: 117)

According to Cunha (2013), the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about a shift in Brazil’s indigenous discussions. “[...] To describe the century as a whole, one can say that the indigenous question was no longer essentially a matter of labor, but a matter of land” (Cunha, 2013: 817). A new question emerged in this context: whether to exterminate the rebellious indigenous peoples or to civilize and integrate them into political society. Accordingly, it was also during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the debate on whether the indigenous peoples were humans or not (*ibid*: 837) began. “The nineteenth century was marked by the scientific debate on the evolutionary classification of indigenous peoples, with great emphasis on the notion of race” (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 94).

Furthermore, the quest for lands during the 19<sup>th</sup> century represented a new and stronger wave of violence between indigenous peoples and Europeans, who considered the former to be obstacles to the country’s development. Ribeiro (2017) describes their situation after the Proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1989:

In the first twenty years of republican life, nothing was done to regulate relations with the Indians; even though, in that same period, the opening of railways through the woods, river navigation with steamboats, and the crossing of hinterlands through telegraph lines had opened many fighting fronts against the Indians, liquidating the last possibilities of autonomous survival of several hitherto independent tribal groups (Ribeiro, 2017: 1985)

The government’s position towards indigenous peoples would only change significantly during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the creation, in 1910, of the first-ever national agency for their protection, the Service for the Protection of Indians (SPI). The SPI was responsible for creating the first Brazilian indigenist policy, which would establish respect for

the indigenous peoples and their traditional ways of living (Ribeiro, 2017) - also pioneering for a law principle. The policy concentrated on four main objectives: “to increase the state’s knowledge about indigenous peoples within its boundaries; to protect indigenous peoples from massacre and exploitation; to protect indigenous lands and to provide indigenous peoples with education to enable them eventually to enter Brazilian society” (Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 331). Ribeiro (2017) highlights the importance of this policy by mentioning how the 39th International Labor Conference in 1956 used it as a reference for creating a document that would set the standards for indigenist policies of all countries with native populations. The SPI was eventually replaced by the National Indian Foundation (Funai) in 1967, after five decades of ups and downs and “a series of corruption scandals” (Cunha, 1987: 80). The new Foundation, however, was created to continue the tutelage policy started by the SPI. “In practice, like the SPI, respect for indigenous culture is subordinated to the need for integration, and the encouragement of change (acculturation) as a policy prevails” (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 131).

There is no doubt that the SPI’s creation was an improvement in the relationship between the Brazilian state and its indigenous peoples, at least in legal terms. However, the Civil Code approved in 1916 still “declares that the Indians are relatively incapable” (Cunha, 1987: 80). With the 1928 Decree, 5.484 “indigenous peoples came under the tutelage of the Brazilian State, a special right that implied a single administrative apparatus mediating Indian-State-national society relations” (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 114). According to Cunha (1987: 29), the tutelage regime should not be primarily considered as a discrimination tool, but rather as another protection mechanism for indigenous groups, since they were not fully aware of Brazilian society’s rules and way of life. Nevertheless, the regime was often used as a coercion method by the Brazilian state when favoring the ruling classes in most cases of dispute between them and the indigenous peoples.

It is of the very nature of the tutelage, its ambiguity; the actions it engenders cannot be read only in a humanitarian dimension (pointing to ethical or legal obligations), nor as a simple instrument of domination. It is in the intersection of these causes and motivations that the key to the understanding of Brazilian indigenism should be sought, a tutelary regime established for the native populations, hegemonic from 1910 until the 1988 Constitution, lasting, to a certain extent, to the present day as a result of power apparatus and governing structures’ force of inertia. (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 115)

The Indian Statute (Federal Law 6001/1973) was sanctioned in 1973 to regulate the indigenous peoples’ legal situation. Nevertheless, the Statute “[...] maintained the SPI legislation’s civilizational and integrationist ideology, while also adopting the tutelary legal framework [...]” (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 131). In the words of Funai, the new indigenous policy remained ambiguous in regards to the recognition of indigenous peoples’ cultural specificity, since it proposed to protect different indigenous cultures while, at the same time, it proposed their integration into Brazilian society (Funai, 2019).

The tutelage regime would last until the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution. “The Constitution deals mainly with indigenous lands, rights over natural resources, litigation forums and procedural capacity. Under the Constitution, indigenous lands are the property of the Union and of inalienable possession and exclusive enjoyment of the Indians” (Cunha 2013: 1872). The 1988 legal code thus changed the legal status of Brazilian indigenous peoples by ending the 1916 Civil Code’s tutelage regime, and by “[...] allowing them, individually or through their organizations, to go to court to defend rights and interests” (Oliveira and Freire, 2006: 133).

Today, the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 is the basis for the domestic legal framework regarding the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples’ rights. It is considered one of the most progressive legislations on the matter. According to James Anaya, the former United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and

Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People (May 2008 to May 2014), the Brazilian Federal Constitution “recognizes the cultural diversity of the country and includes a specific chapter with two articles on ‘Indians’. This Constitution was one of the first in the world to secure indigenous peoples’ rights within the framework of contemporary thinking on indigenous-State relations” (Anaya, 2009: 6).

On paper, indigenous peoples in Brazil seem to have a well-developed legal apparatus for defending their liberties. Their reality, however, is quite different. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, discussed the current regression the protection of indigenous peoples’ rights has been facing in Brazil, in a report from 2016.

Brazil has a number of exemplary constitutional provisions pertaining to the rights of indigenous peoples and was, in the past, a leader in the area of demarcation of indigenous peoples’ territories. However, in the eight years since the visit of the previous mandate holder, there has been a disturbing absence of progress in the implementation of his recommendations and the resolution of long-standing issues of key concern to indigenous peoples. [...] In the current political context, the threats facing indigenous peoples may be exacerbated and the long-standing protections of their human rights may be at risk (Tauli-Corpuz, 2016: 1).

The last demographic Census made by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2010, showed that 896,900 persons self-declared as indigenous people, corresponding to 0.4% of the total Brazilian population. In the country, “[...] 83% of the indigenous peoples who are 10 years old or older have a monthly income of up to a minimum wage [R\$510.00 at the time] or do not have any income at all [...]” (IBGE, 2012). In addition to poverty, violence is one of the most significant issues these communities face. Since 2003, the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (CIMI), an organization that works to defend the rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil, has been submitting annual reports about the attacks brought against them. These documents show a systematic and continuous increase in brutality levels. In September 2018, the Council launched the report with the previous year’s data; the document’s conclusions were extremely disturbing, demonstrating an increase in the number of cases in 14 of the 19 categories of systemic violence measured by the Council. According to Roberto Liebgott, who was responsible for the report,

this edition of the Report makes explicit a reality of absolute legal uncertainty regarding the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples in the country. To make matters worse, the Three State Powers have been accomplices of the pressure on the territory that intends to allow the exploitation of its natural resources, and results in violence in throughout the villages. (CIMI, 2018)

If the circumstances of Brazilian indigenous peoples, as shown through the UN and CIMI reports, were already grave, the new federal government headed by Jair Bolsonaro is working hard to make the lives of indigenous peoples even worse. The election of the right-wing populist candidate as the Brazilian president on October 28, 2018 put Brazilian minorities officially under threat. An extremist and incompetent politician, Bolsonaro openly displayed a speech that could be classified as fascist, misogynist, chauvinist, homophobic, xenophobic, and racist. He has also made his intention of “integrating” the indigenous people in Brazil extremely clear. His first official act as president, in fact, was to transfer the responsibility of certifying indigenous territories as protected land from Funai - the government agency responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of indigenous communities - to the Ministry of Agriculture, which has traditionally championed the interests of industries wanting greater access to protected lands, like mining and energy companies, and the agribusiness. “Rural groups have historically opposed the demarcation of indigenous land and believe that ‘a good Indian is a dead Indian’. Bolsonaro is thus fulfilling his campaign promise of zero demarcations of indigenous lands”, indicates María Lourdes Alcántara (IWGIA, 2019).

Besides enforcing governmental decisions and changes that are clearly harmful to these peoples, Bolsonaro's discriminatory speech against this subaltern group is also dangerous because it institutionalizes the prejudice and racism against them. In November 2018, the president compared indigenous peoples to 'animals in a zoo'. After that, the CIMI manifested their concern in an open letter:

Bolsonaro insists on equating indigenous people with animals in zoos, which is in itself unacceptable. In doing so, the president-elected signals that indigenous people can be hunted down and expelled by those who have an interest in exploring indigenous territories and who think like him. [...] Finally, it is unequivocal that the words of the president-elected serve as an incentive to and endorse actions that attack the lives of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil; they are therefore antagonistic to the state's duty to implement demarcation and protect the territories and indigenous peoples' lives. (Congresso em Foco, 2018)

Attacks and violence against indigenous peoples in Brazil escalated in 2019 and garnered world attention. According to preliminary data released by the CIMI, from January 2019 until September 2019, 160 cases of invasion and illegal exploitation of indigenous lands were registered. President Bolsonaro's attacks against indigenous peoples reached new extremes in his speech at the opening of the 74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, on September 24, 2019, in New York. While addressing the issue of the Amazon rainforest fires that had become international news in August 2019, Bolsonaro insinuated that indigenous peoples were to blame for what was happening. "At this time of year, the dry weather and the winds favor spontaneous and criminal fires. It is worth stressing that there are also fires started by indigenous peoples and local populations, as part of their respective cultures and form of subsistence" (Itamaraty, 2019). Furthermore, for the Brazilian president, indigenous peoples who do not embrace the Western capitalist lifestyle are living as "cave people" (Itamaraty, 2019). Finally, during his speech, Bolsonaro also tried to delegitimize indigenous leadership. "The views of one indigenous leader do not represent those of all Brazilian Indians. Many times, some of these leaders, such as Cacique Raoni, are used as pawns by foreign governments in their informational war to advance their interests in the Amazon" (Itamaraty, 2019).

National and international organizations that support indigenous peoples and human rights immediately repudiated Bolsonaro's speech at the UN General Assembly. "We stand beside Cacique Raoni, a defender of Indigenous peoples' rights and the Amazon, in his struggle for his people and their land. Bolsonaro's empty rhetoric trying to delegitimize his struggle and that of all Indigenous peoples is incredibly dangerous and divisive" said the executive director of Amnesty International Brazil, Jurema Werneck (Amnesty International, 2019). Despite the international outcry, any analysis of the Brazilian scenario in the last couple of years demonstrates how the indigenous state of affairs worsens by the day, with the exacerbation of violence against them, invasion of their lands, and dismantling of the flimsy state apparatus built to work in their favor.

It is worth noting, however, that this situation is not entirely recent, for Brazilian society has a history of mistreating indigenous peoples, depriving them of their rights and keeping them in a subaltern position (Mignolo, 2005) – proving the impossibility of a *racial democracy*'s<sup>4</sup> in the country. As has been examined in this paper, although the 1822 declaration of independence terminated Portuguese political control over Brazil, coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) remained, keeping Brazil economically and culturally dependent on Portugal.

4 "The popular Brazilian ideology of racial democracy holds that there is no prejudice or discrimination against non-whites in Brazil, certainly not when compared to the United States". (Hasenbalg and Huntington 1982: 129)

When white Brazilian elites had assumed power, they maintained the same racialized socioeconomical structure present in the country since the 1500 invasion, thus consolidating the historical-structural dependency which Quijano (2000) writes about. By maintaining the racialized social and labor division, Brazilian elites began a process of “internal colonialism”, in the words of Pablo Gonzales Casanova (1965). Casanova’s notion stems from the fact that “the concept of colonialism has been used, above all, as an international phenomenon which explains relations between different peoples and nations” (Casanova, 1965: 27); however,

with the disappearance of the direct domination of foreigners over natives, the notion of domination and exploitation of natives by natives emerges. In the political and historical literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it can be observed how the Latin American countries absorb these new experiences. The “pro-Indian” and liberal literature of the nineteenth century points to the substitution of the domination of Spaniards by that of the “creoles.” Interestingly, the exploitation of the Indians continues, having the same characteristics it had before independence. (Casanova, 1965: 27)

For Kwame Nkrumah (1965), the emergence of independent nation-states created *neocolonialisms* - “modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about ‘freedom’” (Nkrumah, 1956). These new forms of colonialism are as violent as the original form (Santos, 2018). The concept is presently applicable, seen that

The new shapes colonialism takes are more insidious because they occur in the heart of the social, economic and political relations dominated by the ideologies of anti-racism, universal human rights, the equality of all before the law, non-discrimination, equal dignity of children and daughters of any god or goddess. Insidious colonialism is gaseous and evanescent, as invasive as it is evasive - in short, cunning. However, this does not mislead or lessen the suffering of those who are victims of it in their daily lives. It flourishes in non-institutional, even if systematic, social apartheid. It occurs in the streets, in houses, in prisons and in universities, as well as supermarkets and police battalions. It easily disguises itself from other manners of domination such as differences in class and sex or sexuality, even though it is always their constituent component. (Santos, 2018)

Being in a disadvantageous social, racial, political, economic, and epistemological situation since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century does not mean that indigenous peoples from the colonized territories gladly accepted the subaltern position colonizers have enforced on them. Since the invasion, indigenous peoples from Latin America have continuously fought against European domination. “Ever since the conquest, indigenous communities in Latin America have been contesting the dominant ideology of the sixteenth-century European colonizers and the institutionalized exploitation and oppression it legitimized” (Warren and Jackson, 2003: 13). However, it is only from the decades of 1960 and 1970 onwards that indigenous peoples started to transnationally organize by using “international forums, human rights law, and international conventions to press for their goals” (*ibid*: 1). This includes the case of Latin American native peoples, who have since then united in their criticism of the occidental model of authority, power over nature, and sovereign nation-states. “The Pan-American discourses that emerged to celebrate indigenous otherness often stress a non-materialistic and spiritual relation to the land, consensual decision-making, a holistic environmentalist perspective, and a reestablishment of harmony in the social and physical worlds” (*ibid*: 13).

It is important to keep in mind that indigenous peoples, even when belonging to the same country, are very different from one another. “As a result of this diversity, we can expect that the peoples identifying themselves as indigenous will pursue a variety of struggles and accommodations in different parts of the Americas” (*ibid*: 11). According to Peter Wade, the indigenous social movements that emerged in the 1960s can be categorized as new social movements, given they are different from the “classic trade union worker’s protest of earlier decades” (Wade 2010: 113) in the sense that the indigenous ones focus less on modernization

and revolution and more on the multiplicity of political spaces they can construct. “There is also often less emphasis on the sphere of production (labor versus capital) and more on ‘reproduction’ (for example, of the environment, whether urbanized or rural)” (*ibid*: 113).

In the case of Brazil, it is a consensus among authors (Ramos 1997 e 2003, Juliano 2006, Oliveira and Freire 2006) that an organized indigenous movement was born in the 1970s, with the support of the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (CIMI) - created in 1972 as a branch of the National Conference of Brazil’s Bishops (CNBB). “By providing, or substantially covering, transportation, food, and lodging expenses, the missionaries brought together representatives of several indigenous groups to participate in informal gatherings” (Ramos, 1997), which would later be called indigenous assemblies. Indigenous peoples convened for the first time in Brazil with assistance from the CIMI.

As indigenous awareness expanded beyond strictly local problems, assemblies moved from regional, particularly in the north, northeast, and center-west, to national level. Consequently, they began to attract the attention of authorities, among them officials of the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) who outright opposed CIMI’s organizing efforts. During the military regime, several assemblies were disrupted by the federal police or by FUNAI. (Ramos, 1997).

It is important to highlight that Funai was created under the Military Regime with the alleged purpose of protecting indigenous peoples, their rights, and their lands, continuing the work of both Rondon<sup>5</sup> and the SPI. Nonetheless, the same government that launched Funai also defended economic development above all else and held that indigenous peoples should not stand in the way of this development (Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 333). In 1978, Ernesto Geisel’s government drafted an emancipation decree which would “release indigenous lands from the exclusive usufruct rights held by the Indians and open them for development” (Ramos, 2003: 266). He then tried to convince the Brazilian people of its progressiveness using the false argument that indigenous emancipation would provide for autonomy.

At the same time as the State reaffirmed the “Indians’ relative incapability”, attempts were made to emancipate the Indians, as a final strategy for the appropriation of indigenous lands and the definitive extinction of their peoples as differentiated ethnic groups, in the aims to make them ordinary citizens, accommodated in the poorest and most excluded sections of Brazilian society. (Luciano, 2006: 71)

Geisel’s government’s attempt to finally integrate indigenous peoples through the emancipation decree put the indigenous question in the national debate’s core, contributing to the growth of related movements. The decree was shelved in the end, but it had already served to wake the indigenous movement. “It was an extremely rich period, especially with regard to indigenous mobilization, from local and regional levels to early 1980s’ major mobilizations in favor of indigenous rights, as part of the Constituent process that would culminate in important achievements in the 1988 Constitution” (Luciano, 2006: 73). In that context, the Union of Indigenous Nations (UNI), the first national indigenous organization, was created in 1980. “The organization challenged the open hostility of a strong, militarized state which repelled the idea of having nations within the nation and organized in a Union” (Ramos, 1997). The government tried to repress indigenous mobilization, but these communities now had support

5 Colonel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon was initially responsible for the implementation and inauguration of telegraph lines in remote areas of Brazil, in the beginning of the 20th century. Part indigenous, Rondon “was a deeply religious positivist who believed that all human societies, including the indigenous ones in Brazil, possessed the capacity to climb the ladder of progress and participate in the unfolding of civilization” (Maybury-Lewis 2002: 331). For Colonel Rondon, indigenous peoples’ lives should be protected until they could, by themselves, decide to abandon primitive ways of life and embrace Western civilization (Ramos 1998: 80). He was responsible for the creation of the Service for the Protection of Indians (SPI).



from non-indigenous peoples and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). “While state and private repression soared, the growing strength of the indigenous and indigenist movements began to make itself visible in the press, among lawyers, and in the National Congress” (Ramos, 2003: 267).

All this mobilization led to a crucial achievement: the promulgation of the new Federal Constitution in 1988. The Constitution represented great improvement for indigenous peoples’ rights, since it eliminated “the assimilationist clauses that were written in previous constitutions” (*ibid*: 268). According to Oliveira and Freire (2006: 196), after the document’s promulgation in 1988, the Union (UNI) lost its initial impetus, whereas local and regional organizations were quickly created. “In the year 2000, there were 183 indigenous organizations in the Amazon region alone” (*ibid*: 197). From the 1990s onwards, a considerable number of formal, institutionalized and legalized indigenous organizations were created, and “[...] began to assume more and more functions that the state no longer directly performed, especially in the areas of health, education and self-support” (Luciano, 2006: 78).

All of this broadened the indigenous movement’s agenda. If, on the one hand, the NGOs assumed an essential role in providing services to the indigenous populations that should instead have been provided by the state, on the other hand, the proliferation of these organizations caused, according to Ramos (2003: 269), the political weakening of the movement as a whole, given that each organization had its own agenda and interests, contributing to the privatization of indigenous issues. For Luciano, the indigenous movement’s challenge is thus to “[...] maintain and guarantee the rights that have already been acquired, and fight for other rights that still have to be won in order to consolidate the ethnic perspective of the future, burying the threat of these peoples’ extinction” (Luciano, 2006: 84). It is vital, according to Luciano (2006) that white Brazilian people stop considering indigenous peoples to be transitory, seeing them as groups and individuals who will someday cease to exist. In that sense, it is necessary to “[...] ensure the capacitation of the movement’s members, organizations and communities to overcome technical and political shortcomings in the struggle to defend indigenous rights, in the face of an increasingly complex, technocratic and scientific society” (*ibid*: 84).

One of the biggest and most famous indigenous peoples’ mobilizations in Brazil is the Free Land Camp (*Acampamento Terra Livre*). Since 2004, indigenous peoples from all over the country have assembled in Brasília, Brazil’s capital, to protest and demand that their rights be respected. In April 2019, more than four thousand indigenous people gathered in Brasília to object to the changes announced by president Bolsonaro at the beginning of the year (the transfer of land demarcation responsibilities from Funai to the Ministry of Agriculture). In May, one month after the mobilization, Congress voted to keep the demarcation of indigenous lands in Funai’s hands. It was another crucial victory for Brazilian indigenous peoples, and cemented the importance of their social mobilization.

## **Indigenous Women in Brazil: gender discussions and social movements**

As mentioned above, indigenous peoples in Brazil are currently facing unsafe times. Nonetheless, indigenous women have even more challenges to overcome, since they are simultaneously members of two subaltern groups, meaning they face discrimination and other obstacles both for being indigenous (racism) and women (sexism). Bearing in mind that “people’s lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways” (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 26-27), it is appropriate to adopt an intersectional approach when analyzing the context of indigenous women. According to Nira Yuval-Davis, an intersectional approach “addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy,

class oppression, and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like” (Yuval-Davis, 2009). In the words of Hill Collins and Bilge:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of that social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves” (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 2).

Indigenous women worldwide have been organizing, demanding space for gender-based discussions, and increasing their political influence not only within their communities but also at a national level (Vinding, 1998: 11). Even though they have important roles as workers, activists, and providers, most indigenous women face numerous challenges in their daily lives. “They are marginalized, often subjected to all forms of discrimination and oppression, have no access to information and get little training and education, and do not participate in decision making” (Vinding, 1998: 12). The struggle is naturally also very real for Brazilian indigenous women. The report “Violence Against Indigenous People in Brazil”, launched in 2017 by the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (CIMI), for instance, addressed the specific issue of violence against indigenous women. According to the report, they face several threats like domestic violence and rape, by both outsiders and indigenous men. They also suffer from being stereotyped as indigenous women.

Violence against indigenous women is not just rape. We are subjected to all forms of constraint. For example, how many times have I heard ‘you do not look like an Indian!’. If the woman no longer speaks the mother tongue, she is brutally criticized. If she wears [modern] clothes, she is also criticized or called ‘acculturated.’ And what about marriage when she does not feel like getting married? Also, when nature is assaulted, the indigenous woman feels it. The land, the water, and the forest are females”. (Kambeba, 2016)

However, discussing gender issues is not always an easy task. This is especially true given that indigenous societies have many differences when it comes to their social structures and traditions to Western modes of thought, and that includes gender-related matters. In that sense, “[...] contemporary Aboriginal women are subjected to patriarchal and colonial oppression within settler society and, in some contexts, in Aboriginal communities” (Green, 2007: 22). Nevertheless, it is necessary to address gender-based discrimination and women’s rights when discussing indigenous women’s matters, even though it may not be a simple task. Hill Collins and Bilge argue that, since “the nexus of power they face includes colonialism as well as patriarchy, white supremacy, and poverty” (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 73), indigenous women need to bear in mind their social existence’s intersectional dimension if they want to achieve the goal of “denaturalizing the legitimacy of colonial nation-states and white-settlers societies” (*ibid*: 73).

Indigenous feminist analysis and activism must aim to understand the changing situations, the commonalities, and the specificities of indigenous women across time and place; it must seek ultimately to attain social justice not only along gender lines but also along those of race, class, and sexuality. (Huhndorf and Suzack, 2010: 3)

A study titled “The institutional organization of the indigenous women's movement in Brazil: notes to start thinking”, developed by the Brazilian anthropologist Luís Roberto de Paula (2008: 58-59), provides us with the statistical basis to consider the subject. At the time

of the study, the number of national indigenous organizations was deemed higher than 350. Among them, 34 were identified as indigenous women's organizations, which represents around 10% of the total. For Angela Sacchi (2003), the space to discuss gender issues is being constructed among indigenous peoples in Brazil, but in a limited way. According to Sacchi (2003: 102), indigenous women in Brazil often include in their demands the same claims of other indigenous movements, such as land rights and access to differentiated health and education systems. "[...] The construction of indigenous women's identities puts them in the position of having to preserve traditional values and affirm their ethnic tradition while, at the same time, fighting against gender-specific inequalities" (Sacchi and Gramkow, 2012: 18). As Maria Helena Ortolan Matos points out, in Brazil, the indigenous movement initially aggregated indigenous men and women around collective claims, agendas through which ethnic groups demand from the Brazilian state their right to be differentiated citizens (Matos, 2012: 148). In this respect, indigenous movement in Brazil activated, at first, what was controversially defined by Gayatri Spivak (1996) as *strategic essentialism*: a political strategy used by minority/subaltern groups in which they temporarily/occasionally overlook internal differences (such as ethnicity, culture, gender, etc.) with the main purpose of achieving a higher goal. In other words,

[...] strategic essentialism in this sense entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives. (Eide, 2010: 76)

Nonetheless, in the last couple of decades, indigenous women in Brazil have organized themselves around gender-specific claims - like reproductive health care and childcare, combating violence against women due to alcoholism, demanding greater female participation in indigenous and indigenous public spaces, greater opportunity for training indigenous women, among others (Matos, 2012: 149). They have done so by founding various women's organizations and associations from the 1980s onwards and by creating women's departments inside indigenous organizations. According to Matos, this whole process ensured an increase in discussion among indigenous women, but "[...] more expectations were created than indigenous policies could actually live up to in their current context, with regard to the insertion of gender issues in the indigenous movement" (*ibid*: 155). This means that indigenous women still have a long way to go when it comes to having their gender-based rights respected.

In reinforcing the struggle for the needs of their peoples, therefore, they state that 'there are specific things regarding women, violence, rape, drinking, abandonment, separation of couples, which is not for the bigger movement to discuss'. Together with the introduction of new themes, they demand effective participation in decision-making and occupation of positions in various areas (health, education, politics, etc.). (Sacchi, 2003: 102)

As defined by the Aymara Bolivian poet, singer-songwriter, writer and decolonial feminist Julieta Paredes, "feminism is the struggle and the political alternative proposed by any woman anywhere in the world, in any era of history, who has rebelled against the patriarchal system that oppresses her" (Paredes, 2015: 28). Within the context presented so far, indigenous women could thus benefit from adopting a feminist perspective when formulating their gender-based demands. At first, this definition seems very generic and mainstream, but it is actually an essential construction in the terms of Paredes' critique of Western feminism and for the impact that its hegemonic position can have over indigenous and other colonized women. The Bolivian author does not ignore the importance of Western feminist theories for the emancipation of women; however, she emphasizes that such theories were developed within the context and in the interest of white, middle-class women living in developed countries and, for that reason,

do not fit the reality of indigenous, poor working-class women of color, living in colonized countries (Paredes, 2015).

Feminism in the West responds to the needs of women in those societies, who carry out struggles and articulate theoretical constructions in an attempt to explain their situation of subordination. When colonial, imperialist, and transnational relationships were implanted in the world, these theories became hegemonic in the international sphere, making other realities and other contributions invisible. (Paredes, 2015: 28)

The invisibility of the colonized woman as identified by Paredes (2015) was also pointed out by the American scholar of Chicana cultural theory and feminist theorist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa. The author develops research on the marginalization of the mestiz.<sup>6</sup> In her prominent essay “La conciencia de la mestiza” (2005), Anzaldúa highlights the lack of space and representation for mestiza women, who are denied participation and representation in all societies and cultures of which they are a part of, also suffering chauvinism on behalf of the mestizo men who diminish and violate their integrity. Although Anzaldúa recognizes that mestizo male violence against mestiza women is motivated by “the loss of a sense of dignity and respect” (Anzaldúa, 2005: 710), in their relationship with white, Mexican and indigenous men, the author sees no space for forgiveness or tolerance of this behavior. Instead, she states that

From the men of our race we demand admission/recognition/revelation/testimony that they hurt us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power. We need them to say that they are going to start eliminating their painful ways of diminishing us. However, more than words, we demand action. We tell them: we will acquire powers equal to yours and to those who have humiliated us. (Anzaldúa, 2005: 711)

Both Paredes (2015) and Anzaldúa (2005) urge for a non-Western, non-mainstream variety of feminism that makes space for colonized women to voice their struggles and needs. According to Anzaldúa, “the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored race, between men and women, lies in healing the division that originates from the very foundations of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (Anzaldúa, 2005: 707). In this respect, the critiques developed by Paredes (2015) and Anzaldúa (2005) show that even the feminist field is not free from the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). Paredes (2015) goes even further in her criticism by addressing the relationship between neoliberalism and human rights, and its effects on colonized women and other subaltern groups.

Neoliberalism unleashed a great postmodern propaganda of human rights promotion; supposedly women, the indigenous, homosexuals, youth, and the disabled were recognized, and given their so-called rights. In reality the only women, indigenous, homosexuals, youth, and disabled who were rewarded or recognized were those of their own social class or those with the same political beliefs or those who, in their diversity, would serve an economic or political purpose without protesting. Rebels and revolutionaries had no place in this dividing up of privileges. (Paredes, 2015: 20-21)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty is another example of a feminist author who criticizes the coloniality of power of Western feminism. In her essay “Under Western Eyes” (1984), she analyzes the “Women in the Third World Series”, published by Zed Press, and concludes that the authors “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular “Third World Woman” (Mohanty, 1984: 334). According to Mohanty, Western feminist discourse exercises

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<sup>6</sup> A mestiza is a woman who is part American, part Mexican, and part Indigenous.

its power over colonized women by putting them in a homogeneous category of “powerless groups often located as implicit victims of particular socio-economic systems” (*ibid*: 338). For Mohanty, the problem in using ‘women’ as a group and category of analysis is that

it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts, this move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities. What characterizes women as a group is their gender (sociologically not necessarily biologically defined) over and above everything else, indicating a monolithic notion of sexual difference. (Mohanty, 1984: 344)

The author argues, then, that feminist analyses must consider the different contexts in which women are inserted. “It is on the basis of such analyses that effective political strategies can be generated” (Mohanty, 1984: 347).

During the 2019 Free Land Camp (*cf. infra*), the indigenous women of Brazil had their first specific plenary in the movement’s history. As an outcome of this plenary, they organized the First Indigenous Women’s Forum and March in August 2019. The march brought 2500 indigenous women to Brasilia, representing 130 different indigenous peoples from every region in the country. In their final statement on the event, the women explained their understanding of gender roles and how their perception about women and men is shaped with regard to the colonial process.

The gestures of our combat dance contemplate the need for a return to mutual support between the feminine and the masculine, without, however, essentializing men or women. Machismo is yet another epidemic brought to us by European settlers. Thus, what non-indigenous women consider to be violence may not be what we consider to be violence. This does not mean that we will close our eyes to the violence that we recognize in our villages, but rather, that we need to consider how it developed in our communities in order to counteract, problematize and bring critical reflections about our everyday practices and contemporary forms of political organization. We need to engage in dialog and strengthen the power of indigenous women, reclaiming our matriarchal values and our historical memory so that we can advance social rights in our territories (APIB, 2019).

In their final document, the Brazilian indigenous women emphasized the importance of keeping their ancestors’ lands and territories. As they explained, “life and territory are one, for the earth gives us our food, our traditional medicine, our health and our dignity. To lose our territory is to lose our mother. Whoever has territory, has a mother, has a lap to rest their head on” (APIB, 2019). The document comprises of 14 key points to be used as a guide for indigenous women’s protests. From this total, however, only four topics directly address women’s issues, while the other ten address general indigenous matters such as specific health, education, land, juridical rights, and racism.

The results of this reunion are representative of indigenous women’s paradoxical situation. “[...] Indigenous women have the difficult task of reconciling the fight against discrimination and racism that experienced by them and their peers with their peers’ opposition, due to the ‘traditional’ attitudes that may clash with their desires as women” (Sacchi and Gramkow, 2012: 20). The biggest challenge, then, is to find a middle ground - a task that Latin American indigenous women have been tirelessly trying to complete, according to Aída Hernández Castillo (2010).

To speak of indigenous feminisms would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. Nevertheless, beginning with the 1990s we have seen the emergence of indigenous women’s movements in different Latin American countries, movements that are struggling on different fronts. In many cases these indigenous women’s struggles for more just relations between men and women are based on definitions of personhood that transcend Western individualism. Their notion of equality identifies complementarity between genders as well as between human beings and nature. (Castillo, 2010: 540)

## Concluding remarks

Since the 1492 European invasion of the territories known today as the Americas, the native peoples that inhabited these lands, namely indigenous peoples, have been systematically oppressed, discriminated, subjugated, excluded, and killed as a result of the colonial process. This paper intended to demonstrate how such circumstances are a result of the coloniality of power's (Quijano, 2000) pervasive permanence even after the end of Eurocentered Colonialism. "Although colonial administrations have been almost entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organized into nation-states, non-European people are still living under crude European-Euro-American exploitation and domination" (Grossfoguel, 2002: 205). In that sense, the coloniality of power is related to the "continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations" (*ibid*: 205).

The construction of a racialized society and the European domination over colonized peoples was possible due to the creation of Eurocentric epistemology and a paradigm of rational knowledge, which would impose the idea that only European culture and expertise were valid. "The strong belief that their knowledge covered the totality of the known brought about the need to devalue, diminish, and shut off any other totality that might endanger an epistemic totalitarianism in the making" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 195). The position of racial, social, and epistemic inferiority attributed to non-European peoples by modern colonizers created what Mignolo defines as the "colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2005: 386), which transformed non-European peoples, such as indigenous peoples, into subalterns and put them on the "other side of the abyssal line" (Santos, 2016). There, they became nonexistent, that is, "not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being" (Santos, 2016: 118).

The indigenous peoples' disadvantaged situation can also be explained by how long it took the Western world to recognize them as national minorities, entitled not only to individual human rights but also to specific group rights. The establishment of the Human Rights Regime, after the end of World War II, was based on liberal ideas; it emphasized the individual and, therefore, individual rights above all others. It was only at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that political scientists started to realize how the redistribution of political-economic resources was insufficient for achieving social equality and justice, and how the recognition of cultural diversity would also be necessary.

By acknowledging the existence of minority groups and the need for differentiated and specific group rights to complement their general human rights, Western society started developing international laws and other instruments to ensure the liberties of minority groups, including those of indigenous peoples. The first international binding document developed to ensure indigenous peoples' legal liberties was the Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which set the standards for indigenous rights. After that, other instruments were created with a similar purpose, such as the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Even so, the situation of indigenous peoples worldwide and in Brazil is far from ideal.

Brazil ratified all international instruments regarding indigenous peoples' rights and has a well-developed national legal apparatus that should ensure their enforcement. Despite this, the reality these groups face is different from what is seen on paper. Indigenous peoples in Brazil are marginalized and suffer from poverty, murder, and other kinds of violence, particularly related to land issues. Since the beginning of 2019, they have also been facing attacks from Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who is openly against specific group rights for indigenous communities and has been deliberately working to undermine them.

If the situation for indigenous peoples in Brazil is bad, it is even worse for indigenous women, who simultaneously belong to two subaltern groups and suffer from sexism in addition to racism. It is therefore necessary to adopt an intersectional approach when analyzing their

situation. This means that, when trying to explain the unequal and unjust position of indigenous women in Brazilian society, one should also consider the implications of race, gender, class, age, disability, and the relationship between these categories.

In Brazil, as in Latin America in general, it is common for indigenous women to include indigenous peoples' usual claims among their specific gender-based demands. The construction of indigenous women's identities puts them in the position of needing to preserve traditional values and affirm their ethnic tradition whilst having to fight against gender-specific inequalities (Sacchi and Gramkow, 2012: 18). In this context, it could be interesting for indigenous women to adopt feminist perspectives when trying to add gender discussions to the indigenous social movements' agenda. However, it would be necessary to adopt non-mainstream and non-Western varieties of feminism, given how Western theories were developed within the context and in the interest of white, middle-class women, living in developed countries. For that reason, they do not fit the reality of indigenous, poor, working-class women of color, living in colonized countries. The main challenge is to find some middle ground, allowing indigenous women to maintain their cultural specificities while making it also possible to contest indigenous traditions and/or realities that keep them in an unequal and unfair position, not only with respect to indigenous men but in relation to the whole of society.

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# Practices in motion: The dynamics of Family Farmers organizations and the new interactions between social movements and the State

Elisa de Jesus Garcia,<sup>1</sup> Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

**Abstract:** New forms of interaction between the State and society, established through the creation of institutional spaces for social participation and new public policies for family farming, have affected the dynamics of several family farmers' organizations in Brazil. Using Oral History methodologies, the present research aims to analyze the historical trajectories of these political organizations and the different experiences lived by family farmers who organize themselves in trade unions, associations and family farming cooperatives in the Zona da Mata Mineira region (Brazil). Our initial findings point to the kind of changes experienced by these family farmers (organized in social movements) and to how these changes have been converted into strategies, definition of agendas and institutional changes within such social organizations.

**Keywords:** social movements, public policies, organizations, family farmers.

## Introduction

The present paper presents the partial results of an ongoing PhD research, developed at the Graduate Program of Social Sciences in Development, Agriculture and Society (CPDA) of the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ). The main objective here is to assess the action of social organizations in the processes of implementation of public policies for rural development, considering the issues of political representation, power relationships and practices within these processes.

In recent years, the dynamics of social organizations of family farmers have been influenced by the development of new forms of State-society interaction. These configurations result from the creation of institutional spaces for social participation along with a new set of public policies for Family Farming in Brazil<sup>2</sup>. In fact, since the 1990s, Family Farming has experienced greater political and social recognition and legitimization. The creation of the National Program for Supporting Family Farming (Pronaf) and other public policies aimed at

<sup>1</sup> Holds a Bachelor degree in History and a Master degree in Rural Extension from the Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV). From 2007 to 2016, the author has been an expert consultant on public policy in the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA). Currently, she is a PhD student at the Programa de Pós-graduação de Ciências Sociais em Desenvolvimento, Agricultura e Sociedade (CPDA/UFRRJ). She has dedicated her research to the subject of rural social movements, specifically referring to political action, power and interaction dynamics between social movements and the State in Brazil. The author would like to thank Dr. Leonilde Medeiros for the dedicated advising, and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) for the financial support.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the terms "rural workers" and "Family farmers" are used to designate the social category represented in the assessed Unions. Although the legislation terminology at the time was "rural workers", the creation of the Family Farming Law in 2011 and the definition and legal recognition of this social category have contributed to a change in statutory names for some of the Unions. From then on, they added the term "family farmers" to designate their social activity base. In addition, it is possible to affirm from field work observations that both terms are commonly used among the basis of the social actors composing this research. Their use varies according to context.

rural areas and agriculture, together with the emergence of institutional spaces for social participation, have expanded the possible areas for institutional action and organization of Family Farmers. Since then, State policies towards family farming have converged with the agendas and scopes of action set by rural social movements.

In Brazil, recent studies on the relations between social movements and the State have posed several questions concerning the implications of institutional forms of action and participation for these groups (Tatagiba, 2011; Silva and Schmitt, 2012; Silva, 2015). Among the topics under debate is the matter of how these organizations have managed to combine their contestation efforts and institutional undertakings within the space provided by public policies. Scholars also question the ability of these organizations to act in conjunction with the State, considering the costs and the limits of this mode of action.

Studies have also indicated the limited outlook of those analytical tendencies that place on opposite sides the claim-making efforts and the propositional ventures made by such groups. These reports contribute to the idea that social movements reduce their possibilities of maintaining autonomy when or if they approach the State directly.

The object of this research comprises a group of social organizations, unions, associations, and cooperatives located in the mesoregion of *Zona da Mata*, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The studied organizations have been at the center of several disputes over political recognition for the actors involved and have occupied a relevant place in the political, social, and economic organization of family farmers in the region for almost three decades.

This scenario is the result of the political action of family farmers and rural workers that come from different municipalities in the region. They have been organized under the influence of left-wing sectors of the Catholic Church as well as under important social organizations and movements associated with the fight for political re-democratization in Brazil at the end of the 1980s - including the Unified Worker's Central (CUT). Since their foundation, the unions and social organizations have acted through different modalities, including the promotion of access to public health services and social rights as well as legal mediation to formalize employment contracts and partnerships between farmers to share land use.

With the creation of Pronaf in 1996, some of these unions have incorporated several activities associated with the implementation of public policies for rural development, following a tendency observed in rural unions at a national level. Such activities included the creation of new social organizations, so as to facilitate access to State policies; the creation and execution of specific projects; and the coordination and participation within public spaces for social management and control, such as the Rural Development Municipal Council (CMDRs), the Food and Nutrition Security Councils and the Territorial Collegiate.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I investigate the power relations and different practices that permeate the political action of family farmers in the context of the *Zona da Mata Mineira* region. I am specifically interested in the actions mediated by rural organizations, considered within the scope of the processes of implementation of public policies for rural development.

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<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> In my work as an activist in social movements - done jointly with the advisory work I carried out with different Unions in the Zona da Mata region, between 2005 and 2012 - I was able to observe how important the implementation of public policies was to organization leaders. Many of the unions had a union director that was on leave or had a professional hired to work specifically with Pronaf. Some of them also had an office or some other kind of physical space, located in the union headquarters, specifically intended for Pronaf-related services (and, in some cases, for Land Credit). Some of the Unions dedicated entire weekdays exclusively to this type of service. In addition, between 2008 and 2009, the articulation of the National Program for Sustainable Development of Rural Territories (Pronat) also operated from a Union office. This topic will be discussed later in the text.

## New interactions between social movements and the State in Brazil

In Brazil, the period following the process of re-democratization and the enactment of the 1988 Constitution was marked by a set of broad and diverse transformations which strongly impacted the relationship between social movements and the State. Among these transformations were the creation of Management Councils and the empowerment of local spheres in public policy management.

The implementation of public policies can be considered a rich field for the analysis of the relations between State and social movements, seen as they mobilize a diverse set of social actors, norms, strategies and power practices that stem from both society and the State. The present level of understanding about these relations, however, lacks the historical and cultural dimensions that constitute the political field in which that interaction is established.

Recent studies have pointed out the need to review the theoretical framework used to analyze social movements and to question how the literature often characterizes the relations between the State and social movements in a dichotomic and normative manner. These relations are characterized by a constant tension due to the possibility of State co-optation and the institutionalization of political action, which would often lead to the bureaucratization and loss of autonomy within social movements.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the challenge of identifying and understanding the different strategies, relationships, and practices in this scenario must overcome the marks and categories that homogenize and oppose social actors, spaces and the dynamics between social movements and the State (Abers; von Bülow, 2011; Silva, 2015).

The importance of autonomy in the exercise of political action has occupied and constituted an important part of the studies on social movements in Brazil. Such studies have dimensioned a militant *ethos*, placing society and State on opposite sides of the political field. Silva (2010), for example, argues that, in Brazil, during the civil-military dictatorship, the social experiences that contested the State helped to categorize social movements as typically contentious. In that context, keeping a certain distance from the State was considered a positive and necessary attribute for these associations. In this sense, specific characteristics are described in the literature as being intrinsic to these groups, such as their contentious ability, relative autonomy, and power of mobilization.

Abers and Von Bülow (2011: 79) point out that, despite the emphasis on 'new social movements' between the 1960s and 1980s, a lot of energy was still being put into discussing which movements were legitimate, effectively transformative, or socially relevant at the time. If the literature in the 1980s was marked by drawing attention to the different forms of organization, social actors, and insurgent themes in the political scene - thus highlighting their capacity to address State-directed demands and claims through a contentious policy that would, at first, guarantee their autonomy - since the 1990s, scholars have called attention to new issues in regards to the processes of political organization in Brazil.

The political shifts brought about by the 1988 Constitution, the consolidation of the rights to organization and mobilization, and the expansion of spaces for participatory social action

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4 By the institutionalization of political action, we understand the sort of political action carried out specifically by civil society political groups and/or social movements and organizations within the State, either in public spaces of participation or in the implementation of public policies created at a State level. In this work, when referring to the institutionalization of the political action within social organizations, we do not have an a priori value judgement, but seek to characterize a specific mode of political action.

have conformed a new context for the relations between social movements and the State, giving rise to new topics in the field of political action. The 1990s were marked by struggles to enforce the rights to social participation and mobilization and to create new spaces for social participation. As a result, social movements were able to institutionalize several agendas and create new management agencies, public policies, and public spaces for social participation.

The new possibilities of relationship with the State constitute the trajectories of social organizations within a democratic construction and motivate new problems concerning their autonomy, their capacity for social mobilization, and the instruments of their political action. The dilemmas concerning participation, political representation, and the construction of political identities are thus intensified. In this regard, Silva (2015) states that

[...] there was always a tension between the statement that the transformations came from the "streets" and the use of the different and, at the time, few available institutional opportunities. Throughout the 1980s, the debate and the conflict between institutional and non-institutional alternatives, including the formulation of several proposals for new participatory institutions gathered under the flag of "popular participation", marked the networks of social movement in Brazil (and, as an important actor within most of these networks, the Worker's Party - PT). (Silva, 2015: 9)<sup>5</sup>

Tatagiba (2011) also considers that

In the Brazilian case, social movements were central actors in the creation and consolidation of the participatory architecture in various areas of public policy. In close connection with social actors of the political and institutional arena, social movements bet on a struggle "inside the State" as a strategy for social transformation. The very emergence of the Worker's Party is inserted within the scope of this bet. This venture inspired long and generally harsh struggles that resulted in the creation and recognition of new citizenship rights, changing the political environment in which governments should operate from then on. (Tatagiba, 2011: 1)

The demands and struggles of the previous decades resulted in the creation of new public policies and new participatory and social management devices, which have also become contested fields within these social movements. A series of new problems have emerged over which the literature is just now shedding light on – such as the new modes of organization and interaction with the State, especially during the governments of the Worker's Party. In this regard, Tatagiba (2011) poses many relevant questions that can guide us through an analytical outlook at these processes.

After over two decades of intense democratic experimentation, how do social movements evaluate the investments in institutional participation? What place does institutional participation have in their action strategies, in view of other potentially available strategies, such as direct action, violence, clientelist relations? In a scenario characterized by a significant offer of participation, what are the risks and advantages of participating and not participating? What are the specific dilemmas that the widening of participation channels poses to the movements' actions, and how have they sought to respond to these challenges? What happens to movements when they take the institutional path? When strong and combative movements in specific policy areas do not invest in the participatory spaces, what are the impacts on the quality of the public debate and on the effectiveness of participation engendered in them? (Tatagiba, 2011: 1)

Thus, since the 1990s, a new dimension has been given to the debate on the relations between social movements and the State due to the growing involvement of social organizations in public policies. In the years 2000, a new set of relationships, conflicts,

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<sup>5</sup> All translations were made by the author, unless otherwise noted.



strategies, and modes of action within these relationships can be observed, setting the need to look at them more carefully. These social and political contexts challenge researchers to abandon their previous dichotomous layout and build theoretical propositions that allow us to understand social movements in their interface and interdependent relations with the State.

### **Dilemmas of democratic construction: social movements closer to the State**

In Brazil, since the beginning of the years 2000, several specificities have characterized the relations between social movements and the State, particularly due to the election of a presidential candidate belonging to the Worker's Party- PT. The various social actors and their representative organizations were an important part of the composition of the Worker's Party government for 14 years. In this sense, they were inserted into a very different scenario from that of the previous decades, that is, of the democratization process. In this context, Abers and Von Bülow (2011) suggest important questions for research paths to analyze the relations between State and social movements and also draw attention to the recent efforts to overcome the paradigms that have haunted the definition of this object of study. These efforts seek to prevent that an excessively theoretical work, fixed on the delimitation of the object, should obscure the different relations between social movements and the State, which should not be understood *a priori* as antagonistic relations.

According to Abers and Von Bülow (2011), in recent years, some theoretical trends have adopted the concept of civil society in the study of collective action. They are strongly influenced by Jurgen Habermas. These works have contributed to an important expansion of the research concerning social movements, including different forms and modes of social organizations. However, they did not advance so much as to effectively broaden the understanding of the forms of relationship between State and society, seen as they tend to consider society as existing out of the State.

On the other hand, in the theory of political process, the presence of the State appears as the main reference for collective actions within social movements. The presence of the State was given a central role in the definition of conflict, and this has contributed to the exclusion from the research agenda of social movements that do not have the State as an interlocutor, thus reducing the analytical scope. The emphasis on struggle and conflict may lead to the exclusion of other important forms of collective action and interaction between social movement activists and State actors, reproducing a narrow, conflict-based view of politics.

In this sense, it is essential to consider that social movements and State should be understood from a relational approach, which means that these groups should not necessarily be analyzed in opposition to the State or unrelated to it. The dichotomy hinders an analytical understanding of the important relationships, strategies, and forms of interaction circumscribed within these borders. Shifts in the social and political field in the recent years and transformations in theoretical debates have led to new ways of thinking about social organizations. Particularly, these debates have shown that their definition as research objects should not be based on an opposition to the State; rather, it seems impossible to create a radical separation between them. According to the authors,

If we perceive the state as a homogeneous block operating from a distinct organizational space, it will be very difficult to recognize the networks that cross boundaries between State and civil society as an important part of social movements. [...] In Latin America - and in Brazil in particular - social movement networks often cross these borders. (Abers and Von Bülow, 2011: 64)

This approach would imply recognizing that social movements cannot be reduced to contentious actions, since their political actors also perform from within the State to achieve their objectives. Abers and Von Bülow (2011: 65) emphasize that

[...] social movements have struggled both to transform social behavior and to influence public policy. As part of these efforts, they often mobilize towards changes in State decision-making processes, demanding the inclusion of civil society in new participatory spaces.

Furthermore, Silva (2015) highlights the need to observe how actors belonging to social movements have increasingly combined contestation and institutionalized action in their political practice. The author points out that the dichotomy placing the autonomous exercise of political representation and the interaction with the State on opposite sides has created certain limitations for analyses that assess how social organizations act through institutionalized instruments and spaces. He notes how this dichotomy frames the studies in a reductionist way:

If, on the one hand, a segment of Brazilian civil society, especially since the beginning of the 1990s, will bet on the possibilities of institutional participation offered by the various channels being established at that time, on the other hand, a significant portion of the Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) developed a composite repertoire of action, combining institutional forms of action and maintaining extra-institutional confrontational forms of action. In this sense, it is possible to observe SMOs launching election candidates, participating in the implementation of public policies and participatory institutions, placing activists in government positions and, at the same time, they can develop conflictive repertoires. Sometimes, the resources (financial, informational, relations, etc.) obtained through different forms of institutional action are exactly the ones that guarantee the conditions to carry out extra-institutional actions. These actions, in turn, become important resources in the disputes taken on by SMO activists within institutional structures. (Silva, 2015: 9).

The dynamics of the social organization analyzed in this work are marked by an important pattern within institutional spaces of social participation and public policy implementation, especially in the last twenty years. To understand specific aspects of the political actions carried out by family farming unions, associations, and cooperatives, it is necessary to examine the modes of action they employ in partnership with the State in their different interfaces – like services, document issuing, executing public resources, or even the indication of beneficiaries to access public policies. Although these organizations were constituted through mobilization around a series of claims, in intense confrontation between local political agents and the State, the dilemmas and conflicts regarding contestation and institutionalization dynamics emerged in the formal process of their structuring and operation.

A careful analysis of this setting allows us to understand how such conflicts are experienced by farmers and leaders in their daily lives. A less normative perception will allow us to insert the dilemmas concerning relations with the State in the group of necessary questions to understand their history and constitution, without throwing them into a limbo-like category of cooptation and illegitimacy. Tatagiba affirms that “what characterizes contemporary social movements is the combination of different forms of action, which makes them much more flexible in relation to their tactics than the movements of the past” (Tatagiba, 2011:3). For the author, however, this aspect requires greater analytical attention.

Strategic decisions are dilemmatic, and result from a complex game in which intentions, resources, opportunities, and relational positions are determinants of the action. The analysis of the repertoire of action of social movements demands sensitivity towards the tactical and strategic dilemmas imposed by conjunctural shifts and/or the structural configuration of the disputed fields, as well as to the cultural nature of the processes in which the actors define what issues are at stake, the contested fields, and shape their identities from their multiple places of belonging and contradictory compromises they often create (Mische, 2008; 2003) (Tatagiba, 2011: 4).

The analysis of interaction repertoires in Brazil<sup>6</sup> demonstrate that social movements have often combined different strategies of action with the State. This also occurs in the political field of family farming. Social movements combine contestation efforts and institutional participation with specific repertoires of demands, policies, and resources. An example is the Family Farming Crop Plan: each year, the program has different moments of negotiation and contestation, coordinated, in most cases, by the rural union movement (Abers *et al.*; 2014; Grisa and Schneider, 2015).

Given these considerations, it may be relevant to question how the combinations of interaction repertoires take place at a local level, within the social organizations of family farmers in each municipality. It is also necessary to investigate how these interaction repertoires are operationalized in the daily lives and contexts of experience of these movements and organizations.

It should also be noted that, in Brazil, the analysis of relations between social movements and the State, especially of those relations contained within the institutional sphere, would have to include the questioning of the political representation mechanisms in place. This analysis would allow us to understand who the political leaders connected to social movements that act through such processes are. Another important point is to establish how the social actors and their organizations make decisions about their channels of interaction with the State and how these interactions affect the groups' daily lives. In this sense, Cortes e Silva (2010) call attention to the need of understanding social movements/State relations from a two-dimensional perspective, that is, a political-institutional dimension and an organizational dimension. According to the authors,

On the one hand, analytical lenses should be able to examine the existing social configurations within civil society and the State, focusing on the deep interdependencies between the actors and processes encompassed by these concepts. On the other hand, social and State actors are reflexive, they make choices based on opportunities for action and strategies to be adopted, taking into account the possibilities limited by the institutional conditions in which they operate and the conjunctural contexts in which they find themselves (Cortes and Silva, 2010: 437).

The contentious action/institutionalization dilemma that has emerged in the field of social movements in recent years and the implications of the institutionalized action of social organizations both comprise important debates for the study of the interaction between social movements and the State. In this regard, Tatagiba (2011) highlights the importance of building a dynamic and relational analysis that takes into account the heterogeneity of both the State and society and considers the multiple and complex processes generated by such relationships.

## Research Methodology and Initial Results

The following research analyzes the historical trajectory and the experiences lived by family farmers and their political leaderships in the Union of the Rural Workers and Family Farmers (STR), in the *Zona da Mata* region (Minas Gerais – Brazil). The farmers are linked to Fetraf

<sup>6</sup> Given the need to theorize on how social movements build bonds with the State, Abers, Serafim and Tatagiba (2014) have proposed a renovation of the concept of “repertoire of action”, by Charles Tilly, building the idea of a repertoire of interaction between State and society. The authors developed four common routines of State-society interaction: protests and direct action, institutionalized participation, proximity policy, and the occupation of positions within State bureaucracy. These modes of interaction and their combination are embedded in the historical aspects of the constitution of movements and governments and, therefore, must also be analyzed from a historical perspective in the different areas of public policy. This implies that institutional forms of interaction with legitimacy within the state should not be isolated from other less institutionalized strategies or instruments. Moreover, such interactions are dynamic and can be adapted according to the social actors themselves, as well as by their organizations.

and Contag<sup>7</sup> and to different family farming associations and cooperatives. The main objective here is to inquire how the executive and operational functions of the different policies and programs for family farming interfere in the construction of political action in rural areas. I also intend to look at the power relations and practices that permeate such processes. In this work, I have assessed a series of experiences within rural organizations that occurred in partnership with the State, especially the implementation of public policies. These movements were analyzed from the viewpoint of the social actors themselves, observing their own dilemmas and understanding them as part of the construction process of political action in rural areas.

The constitution of the unions and social organizations as social movements are directly related to the processes of mobilization of family farmers in the *Zona da Mata* region. The basis of this mobilization can be found in the work accomplished by the Catholic Church, mainly through the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs). During the 1980s, the founding of unions in different municipalities within the referred region represented the institutionalization process of several previous demands and claims, related to different social, economic, and cultural aspects of the farmers' living conditions. To a large extent, these claims sought to secure better living, working, and production conditions. They also strove to fight against dependency relations and clientelist practices with large landowners, employers' organizations, and local politicians. Religiosity, neighborhood- and kinship relations contributed to the construction of a political identity and to the constitution of political action - carried out by these social actors in their role as participants of a social movement (Garcia, 2013).

One of the *Zona da Mata* STR's central characteristics is the existence of a regional articulation that involves social actors and organizations besides the unions themselves - such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community associations, cooperatives, Agricultural Family Schools (EFA) and the Catholic Pastoral. This articulation can be characterized as a network of social movements in the *Zona da Mata* region. It was responsible for the expansion of union-constitution processes, and led to the configuration of shared action repertoires, making up a diverse agenda that ranges from rights implementation, agriculture production, sustainable development, commercialization, alternative technologies, and rural education, to the more recent interests of agroecology, credit cooperatives and gender.

The creation of these unions is, therefore, a result of political action that represents a social movement in and by itself. This conception - of creation as a social organization - is paramount to a better understanding of these groups' actions in the political field, as well as for comprehending their relationship with the State, especially in the public policy implementation process. The political action developed by the organizations was the result of a collective mobilization around the search for social and political changes and better living conditions. In this sense, their relation with the State should be analyzed by taking into account the historical trajectory of their constitution as social movements, as well as by considering the different modes of action in their daily political struggles (which occur in different fronts, and embrace a relevant variety of social actors, agendas and modes of articulation). Their historical trajectories are inserted in the context of an expanded scope of activity of social movements and in the scenario of democratization of the State and society in Brazil. This context sets the emerging dilemmas and conflicts that have permeated political action since then.

The interviews were carried out with 37 family farmers and political leaders of various unions, associations, and cooperatives in the *Zona da Mata* region of Minas Gerais. The

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<sup>7</sup> Federation of Family Farmer Workers (Fetraf) and National Confederation of Agriculture Workers (Contag).

interviews were conducted using the methodological conceptions of Oral History, which encourage social actors to tell their life stories and trajectories of political action - including their social origins and participation in social movements, political parties, and governmental organizations. The interviews were constructed with two main objectives: on the one hand, to reveal decision-making mechanisms of family organizations and social movements in the dynamic of political representation; on the other, the recognition of the shifts and impacts upon their institutional participation practices, within the context of public policy implementation processes.

Initial findings in this research point to significant changes experienced by family farmers and local political leaders. In face of new mechanisms of public policy management, and of the recent shifts in the political scenario, the results indicate how these changes have been translated into action strategies, agenda definitions and institutional transformation for social organizations.

A closer look at the dynamics of these movements and at the trajectories of family farmers' political action in the region has shown that efforts to promote access to government programs and towards the execution of public actions are not at all new. In the specific case of the unions founded in the region during the 1980s, among the modes of action at an institutional level we can observe: the issuing of documents, such as the registration for the National Institute for Medical Assistance and Social Security (INAMPS); the promotion of access to retirement and other social security rights, especially in the beginning of the 1990s.

Since the early 2000s, the implementation of public policies for rural development has played an important role in the dynamics of social organizations for family farming in the region, reshaping their agendas and political action repertoires. The very construction of public policies for rural areas and the institutionalization of family farming in government bodies come as results of a long line of demands. In this new context, the movements have found in the State a privileged interlocutor in the struggle for publicly addressing their interests (Grisa and Schneider, 2015). Concurrently, since the creation of the National Program for Supporting Family Farming (Pronaf) in 1996, the unions have incorporated into their different endeavors many of the functions and activities related to the implementation of public policies - including the creation of new social organizations specifically focused on the access to these policies, as well as project elaboration and execution and further organization and participation in public spaces for social management.

Created in recent years, credit and production cooperatives have been strongly influenced by the demands of public policies. According to the interviewed farmers, access to Pronaf is the main incentive for establishing credit cooperatives. As for the production cooperatives, according to the interviewed leaders, they were created for the execution of the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Food Program (Pnae).

The results indicate that activities and functions linked to public programs and policies interfere with decision-making processes and trigger a series of disputes inside these organizations, as well as with other actors involved in the political scene of family farming. Organizations are confronted with the need to develop new roles, comply with novel legal requirements, and perform new activities that reconfigure their mode of operation and their demands and processes of political representation.

The intense presence of social movements in public policies has influenced a series of factors, such as: a movement of approximation between farmers and organizations, the engagement of new political subjects, the criteria for occupying management positions, and the dynamics of political representation for family farmers.

In this sense, a large number of the interviewed women and young subjects reported having discovered family farming unions, associations and cooperatives while seeking access

to some public policy, whether it be credit from Pronaf, a home from the National Rural Housing Program (PNHR), or selling their production to the school food program.

Another important aspect evidenced by the research is how new types of skills have become important for the social actors involved in conducting the organizations. From the interviews, it was possible to identify a group of younger leaders who have ascended politically in unions, cooperatives, and associations to occupy senior management positions due to their technical skills and abilities to perform administrative functions. There are also leaders who reported being invited to occupy management positions in recognition of the work they carried out in the execution of public policies.

Moreover, new social organizations created to meet policy demands have altered the power relations within these movements. Leaders of Unions, cooperatives and associations assess their relevance through the logic of access to public policies. This has altered the criteria in the definition of priorities in the case of resource allocation and has set off disputes among farmers for political positions and leadership.

Results also show the existence of many dilemmas related to the numerous functions and roles performed by the leaders in the implementation of public policies. The interviewed farmers affirm that grassroots work has become less and less intense, generating problems like the reduction of mobilization-type actions engaged with the implementation of new rights and the involvement in more contentious actions. Nonetheless, the interviewed leaders point out that actions within the implementation of public policies are a priority in the organizations' agendas, since their presence in institutional spaces of participation and the promotion of the access to public policies contribute to their legitimacy in the political field and enable part of their economic sustainability.

## Conclusions

Initial results of the present research allow us to make some considerations regarding the relations between social movements and the State. The implementation of public policies and the choice for an institutionalized pattern of political action are part of the strategies of the analyzed social actors to maintain and strengthen social movement organizations. In this sense, the investment in institutional actions cannot be reduced to the idea of 'cooptation', since the approximation with the State can also be considered as a means of keeping the movement in operation and maintaining its recognition in the political field. Neither is it a matter of giving up autonomy, but of building a relationship with the State that will benefit family farmers. For social movements, their ventures in the implementation of policies in partnership with the State are translated as a way of promoting access to rights in general.

Moreover, the results indicate that it is not possible to make a simplistic connection between the social movement's capacity for mobilization and that of exercising institutional actions. The decrease or increase of these capacities are related to several factors, such as the living conditions of the social base of social organizations, their history of operation and the topic through which they intend to organize people. The assessed social movements did not abandon the organization of disruptive actions but combined them with other practices that compose the daily lives of their organizations, as well as their relationships in the local political arena and their interactions with the State.

In this context, the processes of institutionalization that have occurred in the trajectories of the assessed social movements activate and reconfigure power struggles and update the practices of political action for family farmers. However, the high expectations on the new management instruments created by social and State actors may, to some extent, obscure the limitations surrounding the practice of social management processes. Although the

participation in the management of public policies has been a common objective for family farmers, it has also generated conflicts and contradictions, revealing disputes related to the concept of family farming itself as well as to the notion of development and to the different political projects of family farmers and their organizations of political representation.

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# Democratic deconstructions and resistances: the struggle over participatory institutional legal frameworks in contemporary Brazil

**Bruno Dias Magalhães,<sup>1</sup>** Fundação João Pinheiro School of Government

**Gabriel Mattos Ornelas,<sup>2</sup>** Federal University of Minas Gerais

**Flávia de Paula Duque Brasil,<sup>3</sup>** Fundação João Pinheiro School of Government

**Abstract:** The idea that contemporary democracy is currently going through a global crisis is widely accepted. As a relatively new democracy, the path taken by Brazil has been no different. After two decades of political stability and several years of consistently lessening inequalities - sustained by a mix of social policies, economic growth, exchange political assets coalitions and sector-based participatory institutions - the country now faces the possibility of a rupture in the regime. The roots of the current crisis are often traced back to the 2013 protests, which expressed widespread social discontent at the government and political issues in general, revealing controversies inherent to the Brazilian political system that had hitherto lain dormant. In this paper, we explore how the executive and legislative powers and social movements have acted in two decisive moments of the Brazilian crisis: respectively, the attempt to establish a National Policy of Social Participation Policy (Decree nº 8.243/2014) and the subsequent effort to extinguish most of the federal governments' participatory institutions at a national level (Decree 9.759/2019). Analyzed as institutionalization processes, both moments reveal elements that combine three complementary interpretations of the current crisis: structural, institutional, and political. The paper concludes by exploring how plural political dynamics - such as activism, social movements, participation and representation - can interconnect to enhance resistances and the systemic resilience of a given democracy, in an effort to expand the analytical perspective of Brazilian participatory institutions.

**Keywords:** Social Participation, participatory institutions, representation, institutionalization, crisis of democracy.

## Introduction

The idea that contemporary democracy is currently going through a period of crisis, in which the established regime is challenged by alternative models, is based on three-fold evidence. Firstly, studies of public opinion have revealed a global decrease in the satisfaction and support for the democratic regime. Secondly, political leaderships that channel this dissatisfaction (generally outsiders) are being elected through popular voting despite their authoritarian, violent, excluding, and populist discourses (which demonstrate a lack of appreciation for democratic values, even in contexts of political stability). Thirdly, some authors have pointed out the stagnation or even decline of democratic quality indicators around the world. (Diamond, 2015; Bermeo, 2016; Runciman, 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). According to Ballestrin

<sup>1</sup> Master student in Public Policy Management at EACH/USP. Master's degree in Democracy and Good Government in University of Salamanca (2017). Bachelor's degree in Public Administration (FJP) and Law (UFMG).

<sup>2</sup> Master student in Political Science at PPGCP/UFMG (scholarship from CAPES/PROEX). Bachelor's degree in Public Management at UFMG.

<sup>3</sup> PhD in Sociology at UFMG, Professor at Fundação João Pinheiro School of Government.



(2018), the post-democratic scenario on a global scale is indicated by several contemporary events:

a) a democratic retreat in its hegemonic and formal sense, made possible within the democratic institutions themselves; b) the increasing public authorization of authoritarian, undemocratic and anti-humanist discourses, with popular/populist appeal and adherence; c) the increasing colonization of the international economic sphere over national political life; d) the spreading of neoliberal reason to all spheres of personal and collective life, including politics; e) the growing politics and democracy void. The increasing international privatization of power by the economic authorities and the lack of public control over them highlights the absence of liberal democracy in the very regimes of global governance (p.157, our translation).

Brazil appears to be no exception to this tendency. In 2018, the *Latinobarómetro* survey recorded a historic drop in support for democracy in the country, with only 34% of respondents claiming they preferred democracy to any other regime, while 41% indicated an indifference towards the issue, and 14% expressed a preference for an authoritarian alternative (Latinobarómetro, 2018). Moreover, the country struggles to overcome its status of “partially free” when it comes to freedom of the press, according the most recent Freedom House report. While the 2019 report still classifies Brazil as a free democracy, the extent of corruption investigations and the advocacy of violence associated with the widespread use of false media and misinformation during the 2018 presidential elections - especially against women and ethnic minorities - were highlighted as points for grave concern.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the country’s last elections have led to the inauguration of a president of military origin and far-right political stance, with a history of undemocratic statements that go against human rights. All this took place against a backdrop of general rejection of political parties and traditional political leaders in public opinion.

Since his election, the president has been adopting potentially threatening measures to the country’s democratic institutions. An example was the promulgation of both Decree 9.759, of April 11<sup>th</sup> 2019, which extinguishes several spaces and mechanisms of social participation at national level, and Provisional Measure 870,<sup>5</sup> issued on the very first day of the new government, in order to “supervise, coordinate and monitor the actions and activities of international and non-governmental organizations”. The president and other elected politicians have also been expanding the rhetoric and practice of state repression, focusing especially on marginalized populations in situations of social vulnerability. Finally, a notable restriction of social rights and environmental laws has occurred, indicating a prevalence of economic interests when it comes to social and environmental issues.

According to Runciman (2018), the democratic system is constitutionally better equipped to avert catastrophes than to offer definitive answers to structural problems. It contains checks and balances that can offer opportunities for mediation and reflection on the decisions being taken, decisions which remain available for further review. If this assumption is true, the modern democratic regime, despite its apparent decline and the resulting risks, should be able to improve and reframe itself in different ways, going beyond the technocratic, authoritarian and epistocratic alternatives that seem to currently hold more appeal.

We argue that a possible way to overcome the current democratic crisis would be to improve the regime’s positive capacity to respond to this setting (bringing effective solutions to problems, responsiveness, etc.), mainly by improving participatory and representative

4 Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/brazil>, Consulted in October 11th, 2019.

5 Provisional Measure 870 also extinguished the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA). The Council played a fundamental role in the consolidation of several intersectoral policies, acting in areas related to the production, access to and consumption of healthy foods, health policies, the environment, and education.

dynamics. To support this claim, we explore the crisis of democracy in Brazil through three analytical lenses: (i) the idea that it is a systemic crisis, which indicates the limits of the representative hegemonic liberal model; (ii) the perspective of an institutional crisis, which suggests that the (re)current democratic imbalance stems from institutional change or historic dilemmas within the Brazilian institutional arrangement; finally, (iii) the notion of political crisis, which sees the agency of actors and coalitions as the main cause of the current scenario.

The elements revealed by these three analytical frameworks are examined according to a renewed institutionalization approach, in order to explore the roles of activists, social movements (SM), and political and state agents in two important political periods: 1. The attempt to institutionalize Brazilian participatory practices through the creation of the National Policy of Social Participation (PNPS) and the National System of Social Participation (SNPS), through Decree 8,243 of May 8<sup>th</sup> 2014; and 2. The attempt to deinstitutionalize or abolish the majority of participatory institutions in the Federal Government, as established by Decree 9,759 of April 11<sup>th</sup> 2019. In our final remarks, we highlight the complementarity of institutional and non-institutional aspects as an important mechanism for strengthening the Brazilian democratic system, thus creating a framework that connects participatory, representative, and activist dynamics.

### Three perspectives on the Brazilian democratic crisis: structure, institutions, and politics

There are several interpretations of the so-called democratic crisis in Brazil, a period that roughly comprises the mass demonstrations of 2013 to the present time<sup>6</sup> Avritzer (2018: 274; 2019), by emphasizing how there is evidence of very significant setbacks - which he considers to be mere deviations in a long evolutionary trajectory of democracy in Brazil - draws attention to the paradox that, “until 2013, all short-term indicators pointed to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy in the country. In the nearly five-year period from June 2013 to 2018, there has been a complete reversal of conditions, with the production of a ‘*malaise*’ in democracy”.

To put it briefly, the June 2013 demonstrations were initially instigated by the *Free Pass Movement*, which occurred in protest of the increases in public transport fares in São Paulo. The number and diversity of claims made by the movement quickly escalated, spreading to cities across the country. With a similar style to that of other global protests, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Indignados, and Real Democracy Now! - which presented diverse agendas, such as the “hijacking of democracy by the logic of financial capitalism” (Ballestrin, 2018) - the Brazilian 2013 demonstrations can be considered as part of the “geopolitics of global indignation” (Bringel and Pleyers, 2015). The protests culminated by bringing together general discontent against the political system and were marked by a symbolic dispute over their meaning, in which we see a shift of demands (Romão, 2013) or a transformation of the initial frame (Mendonça *et al.*, 2019). This general dissatisfaction with the political sphere was underscored by a vigorous intolerance to corruption and by the

6 It is important to note that, in the Latin American continent - marked by colonialism, slavery and untamed neoliberalism - a long history of democratic ruptures has taken place, reinforcing the need to carefully weigh and contextualize the analysis of the current democratic crisis and/or debate on post-democracy. The continent has also played a central role in internationalizing the participatory democracy agenda, based on various experiences of local participation (Ballestrin, 2018). To this account, we should add the *longue durée* analysis of Brazilian democracy given by Avritzer (2019), who metaphorically compares the periods of development and setback to the swing of a pendulum that is never stable for long.

rejection of high government expenditure upon hosting the 2014 Football World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

Despite it not being the only narrative arising out of the 2013 demonstrations, nor the only practical development, the widespread discourse of questioning political institutions (Scherer-Warren, 2014) became markedly hegemonic, transforming, to a certain extent, the social consensuses held at the time. In other words, the general mindset would shift from that of a State with an effective social agenda, based on concrete achievements like the reduction of poverty and inequality (Gohn, 2014), to the idea of a corrupt, inefficient, crisis-ridden state, assaulted by a single political party, the Workers' Party, in power for over a decade (França and Bernardes, 2016). This new discourse, articulated through social media and self-referred to as “*sem rótulos*” (without labels), was based on the denial of the political institutions in force at the time, especially political parties and traditional social movements (Bringel and Pleyers, 2015). Through this denial, the channels of political mediation between society and the state were also negated - including those of representative politics and participatory institutions, whose limitations were revealed and denounced.<sup>7</sup>

The new discursive framework that emerged in 2013 had several repercussions. It was governed, on the one hand, by an urgent need for immediate action – usually, rejection-like – without the need to articulate an alternative or project a potential future; on the other, by a series of episodic acts which did not necessarily lead to social accumulation (Bringel and Pleyers, 2015). As a result, the mindset legitimized itself in successive right-wing protests by organizing the opposition against the government and contributing to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016 – which would be seen by some as a parliamentary coup (Santos *apud* Ballestrin, 2018). In these events, the discourse of political institution condemnation articulated with authoritarianism was intensified, by denying diversity and expressing the desire for the suppression of the other. Although not hegemonically, some of the demonstrations called for the return to an authoritarian and utopian past, conveying the desire to implement a non-democratic order with a broad tolerance, or even stimulus, for repression and state violence (França and Bernardes, 2016).

The year 2013 was followed by a growing democratic crisis in the country, partly caused by the impeachment process. The impeachment had been based on the legal argument of budget practices similar to the ones used beforehand in Brazilian politics, but which had not generated such severe consequences. It had also been instigated by actors implicated in corruption allegations. Although supported by the majority, the impeachment did not hold a solid consensus among public opinion. Another cause for the democratic crisis was the systematic advance of the so-called *Lava-Jato* (Operation Carwash), an anti-corruption endeavour that incited the talk of rejection of current political institutions and removed traditional political pivots from the political stage, thus contributing to the breakdown of the political center and deepening polarization. The 2018 elections were held in the midst of this political scenario, which was intensified by a serious economic crisis.

The 2018 electoral process also saw an increase of the spread and production of false information, with campaigns marked by the following: authoritarian and aggressive speeches; intolerance and prejudice against socio-cultural diversity and gender, race and class

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<sup>7</sup> Participatory institutions were consolidated in Brazil after the process of re-democratization and the 1988 Constitution, which expanded civil society's forms of participation and interaction with political issues. Since then, the country has become a benchmark for social participation, with an emphasis on initiatives such as the Participatory Budgeting and Public Policy Councils, which have enabled grassroots actions and political actors to be connected (Avritzer, 2009).

differences; social insensitivity to the need for inclusive economic reforms; occasionally, direct attacks against democratic institutions. Based on the aforementioned factors and their ramifications - the election of leaders with little regard for democracy, the rapid deterioration of government approvals, the ongoing political crisis, the ongoing dispute over legality in the measures to fight corruption, the escalation of institutional violence and state repression, and the retrenchment of the public sphere - we can say that there is still no clear basis for overcoming the crisis of democracy that has taken root in the country.

In this context, the present paper conducts a systematic review of the three interpretative views of the current crisis, in order to indicate possible routes that could ensure the continuity of the participatory project built in the country in recent decades. As mentioned above, the first interpretative outlook indicates the structural reasons for the crisis – which, in our view, arise mainly from the limits of both the liberal-elitist model of democracy, and the participatory model. The second perspective herein described focuses on the institutional crisis and the changes in how government majority is formed, as well as on the institutional incompatibilities resulting from the gradual establishment of a hybrid political system, which sought to articulate representation and participation. The third and final view attributes the crisis to the agency of political actors and the formation of coalitions that deliberately acted on the fringes of the prevailing institutionality.

### *Structural crisis*

The interpretative perspective of a structural crisis is based on the limits inherent to the categories of both representation and political participation, as articulated by the liberal-elitist democratic model. The two main pieces of evidence for such limits as cited by the literature are: (i) the incapacity – and even the abandonment, as a normative ideal – to overcome social and political inequality; and (ii), the failure to recognize institutional selectivity.

Inequality is expressed, materially or symbolically, both inside a given society and within its political institutions. The first aspect indicated by the structural crisis perspective is that there is an incompatibility between the capitalist economic model and the possibility of democracy which is impossible to overcome.<sup>8</sup> In order to fulfil its normative ideals, democracy needs to be in a permanent state of confrontation, not only with the material inequality inherent to capitalism, but also in face of global privatization, the monetization of relations (understood as commodities), and the prevalence of competition over cooperation (Miguel, 2017a: 87). The liberal democratic model, however, is based on an evasion of this structural incompatibility, operated through a reduction (or even a denial) of democracy's normative ideals. By adopting a procedural concept of popular sovereignty that is limited to the electoral period – a notion defined as the competition between political elites for votes - democracy is reduced to a kind of institutional arrangement, needed to reach legislative and administrative political decisions. Among the model's limits, Santos and Avritzer (2002: 46) point to its inadequacy in representing the agendas and interests of a plurality of social actors and minorities.

Neither the nuanced view of power, nor the overestimation of the fluidity politics pluralism articulates, not even the democratic argumentative models – focused either on social

8 For Ballestrin (2018), neoliberal capitalism constitutes itself as the main democratizing force by enhancing inequality in the distribution of resources and limiting the democratization of societies. Accordingly, it is necessary to overcome and eliminate the separation between the economic and political spheres which underlies the field of Political Science, in order to broaden and further elaborate the discussion on the crisis of contemporary democracy and the debate on post-democracy. The author also points out three fundamental pillars to understand the post-democratic debate: democratic formalism, social fascism, and absolute dominance of the financial economy.

participation in decision-making spaces shared with the state (Avritzer 2000) in mini-publics, or on the idea of broad deliberation in the public sphere – are able to fully address the challenges we have indicated thus far. Despite the pluralization of representative and participatory arenas, capacities for effective political influence remain unevenly distributed (Miguel, 2017a). While criticism of the parliament's submission to the large economic interests' lobbying power is widely agreed upon, participatory instances have not been immune to the inequalities of the influence held by the various participants (Pereira, 2019).

Accordingly, the structural crisis perspective argues that the representative and participatory democratic models have failed to overcome the ideological control promoted by the State, whose logic of action reinforces class, race and gender hierarchies, despite the guarantee of civil rights to all (Miguel, 2017a; Pereira, 2019). This ideological control can be observed in the rise of both criminalization and the state repression apparatus, but it is also expressed in more subtle forms, such as the predominance of technical-scientific knowledge over local knowledge. The latter effectively removes decision-making powers from the political sphere and from the citizens themselves, by insisting on the need for technical skills and/or expertise for decision-making on an increasing range of issues (Gaspardo, 2018; Scott *apud* Szwako and Gurza Lavalle, 2019).

These findings reinforce the second piece of evidence for the structural limits of representation and participation, namely, the failure of the institutionalist approach, given the unavoidable selectivity of institutions (Miguel, 2017a; Pereira, 2019). Despite their advocating for a neutral discourse, in fact, institutions respond more to certain interests than to others (Miguel, 2017a). Both selective state punitivism (Pereira, 2019) and the increasing technification of politics are examples of institutions' selectivity, a phenomenon which appears impossible to overcome through the representative and participatory models, seen as they rely on transformation through institutional action. According to Miguel (2017a), since institutions have different sides, any kind of change must be anchored outside of them, thus reconfiguring the materialization of the power dynamics within the state apparatus (p. 87).

In light of the aforementioned factors, one can say that the possible solutions to the structural crisis would involve action beyond institutional boundaries. However, at least in the case of the literature presently under study, a revolutionary alternative is denied. According to Gaspardo (2018), supported by the writings of Mangabeira Unger, the solution may lie in a two-fold overcoming of both “institutional fetishism” and “structural fetishism”, which can be put into operation by diversifying and pluralizing participatory initiatives (named as “democratic experimentalism” by the author). These experiences of sporadic transformation would be able to articulate, at some unspecified point, a kind of radical reform that is capable of bringing about structural change (pp. 81-82). Miguel (2017a) and Pereira (2019), alternatively, believe in the mobilization of civil society movements as resistances. For the first author, strong mobilization, by confronting the current regression of democracy, would force the regime to expose its authoritarian nature, widening the conflict itself from which a democratic reconstruction may emerge. Pereira (2019), in turn, emphasizes the important task of deconstructing socially established values (which she calls resistances) through new and diverse social movements. Such movements ought to demystify the idea of a homogeneous universality, by basing their framework on the recognition of the other and acknowledging the fundamental role held by diversity in the standing against historical silencing and hierarchization.

However, the solutions articulated by the structural crisis view fall short of their attempt to address both material and symbolic inequality and institutional selectivity. Generally speaking, structural criticism is captive to a monolithic view of the State, in which its coherence is overestimated rather than perceived as plural and heterogeneous, composed of variable,

unequal, and multilevel regimes and subsystems. The alternatives proposed by the structural view, however, illustrate an important aspect of the debate: how overcoming the democratic crisis requires radical transformation that goes far beyond the merely institutional aspects. Change requires ongoing social action and mobilization that can dispute the composition of forces within the state and reverse the selectivity of its actions, as well as the dynamics inherent to socialization and its domination patterns.

### *Institutional crisis*

The institutional crisis interpretation places the roots of the Brazilian democratic crisis in the transformation of institutions. In general, it takes the view that the model by which governing majorities of coalition presidentialism are formed, coupled with widespread party fragmentation, impose severe costs of governance which, over the years, culminate in eroding the political regime's legitimacy. Moreover, it states that the institutional foundations of coalition presidentialism would be somewhat contradictory to the participatory model that has become predominant in Brazil in recent decades. The solution articulated by this interpretation points to the need to promote political reforms.

Broadly speaking, despite ensuring great stability in the post-1988 political system (at least up until the July 2013 demonstrations), the Brazilian institutional arrangement has some notable institutional limitations. These are: (i) a tendency to widen party fragmentation, permanently raising the costs of coalition assets and goods required to establish a governing majority; (ii) administrative disorganization within the Executive power, due to the need to hand out positions within the party in order to maintain the coalition; and (iii) a certain proneness for corruption, due to the inherent logic in the distribution of positions, and the consequent use of such powers for directing resources to party electoral bases and congressional leaders (Avritzer, 2016).

Freitas and Silva (2019) identify a gradual change in the model of coalition presidentialism that may have led to such an accelerated partisan fragmentation of the political system. According to those authors, it is essential to incorporate, into the traditional analysis of the relationship between executive and legislative, the role of the judiciary as an instance that induces institutional changes, thus broadening the conception of Brazilian institutional arrangements by including what has been called "constitutional politics" (Arantes and Couto, 2019). In this view, the prohibition on party migration by the Supreme Electoral Court in 2007 contributed to the creation of new political parties. The explosion of fragmentation, however, has the effect of diminishing the relative weight of each party's leadership. As a result, it forces the executive to broaden its coalition base, increasing the costs of governance, as well as potentializing the aforementioned administrative disorganization and corruption risks.

Participatory institutions, in turn, are formal arenas that involve different ways of incorporating civil society into their deliberations about policies (Avritzer, 2009). Among their various manifestations, participatory institutions can take on mandatory or advisory formats, and often have cumulative functions of public policy formulation and control. The development of such institutions in Brazil allows us to speak of an original participatory system (*Idem*). However, their practical democratic operation - in terms of both their interactions with other deliberative and representative forms and in their effectiveness in concretely influencing policy making - demand further empirical research and theoretical-interpretative detail (Lavalle, Houtzager and Castello 2006; Gurza Lavalle, 2011; Avritzer, 2007).

Overall, despite the undeniable advances in the construction of a broad participatory infrastructure within the country over the last few decades (Avritzer, 2016), the effectiveness of participatory institutions presents certain limitations. To list these challenges, we have adopted the framework provided by Almeida (2017), namely: (i) effectiveness of participatory

and deliberative internal dynamics; (ii) effectiveness of representation; (iii) policy effectiveness and policy implementation; and (iv) systemic effectiveness of actors and mechanisms with the state and society (pp. 650-651).

In short, the abovementioned internal dynamics point to the importance of aspects of: (i) organizational design, such as joint participation between state and society, mechanisms for choosing the presidency, defining participating entities, and the board's location in the administrative structure; (ii) internal discussion, such as equality of expression and agenda definition, the presence of debate and contestation, the reduction of bureaucratic aspects and the types of discussion produced; and (iii), the ability to include different groups in the debates and decision-making processes. Regarding this last point, several empirical studies have found that, although these spaces are generally more open to marginalized sectors of society, some inequalities remain (Almeida, 2017; Gasparido, 2018; IPEA, 2013).

As for representation's effectiveness, many studies point to the absence of mechanisms of authorization and accountability within the system – that is, the provision of information and justification over the decisions taken between participants and their respective constituencies. The high number of studies on the issue of accountability demonstrates how the authoritative aspect is difficult to articulate from a theoretical point of view. In fact, it is generally reduced to the recognition of other forms of authorization besides elections, as evidenced in the reflective relationship between representatives and the represented. However, these studies fail to include important considerations about criteria like legitimation, equal access, and voice (Almeida, 2012; 2014a; 2014b; Miguel, 2017b). In this aspect, it is reasonable to accept that, by not clearly articulating the relationship between the authorization and legitimation processes of social participation, such categories end up emanating not from the represented, but from the state that establishes the participatory body (Teixeira, Souza and Lima, 2012).

As for the effectiveness of decision-making, the scholarship puts forth several proposals for measuring its main variables and indicators. Yet, there is a lack of consensus (Almeida, 2017). For the purposes of the present analysis, it is enough to report that little progress has been made in understanding the “complex relational web between state and society” (p. 656), and in the theoretical and empirical formulations capable of grasping the effect participation has in public policy formulation and implementation processes (Almeida, Cayres and Tatagiba, 2015). Although new studies are beginning to unveil these dynamics, by pointing to the different interaction repertoires that exist therein (Abers, Serafim and Tatagiba, 2014), the impact of participatory institutions is generally thought to be adequate in relation to the managing body of public policies, but insufficient in relation to the other relevant executive bodies for transversal public policies, legislature and society (IPEA, 2013). It is worth noting that participatory institutions were not adopted by all areas of public policy, being notoriously absent in areas such as economic development and infrastructure, as well as planning and finance (Avritzer, 2016).

This brings us to the last dimension of legitimacy, that is, systemic legitimacy. As in the previously discussed dimension, the scholarship<sup>9</sup> on the subject has, to a large extent, emphasized the need to better understand the complex network of interactions and *intersectorialities* inherent to public policies, as well as the need to comprehend the construction capacity of both states and civil society organizations - an aspect to which we shall return. Moreover, it states that the debate on participatory institutions should be widened

<sup>9</sup> See Almeida (2017) for a synthesis.

to include society in general, seen as the social body often lacks information about deliberations and decisions (Romão, 2014).

As stated earlier, the institutional crisis outlook points to institutional reform as the main solution by indicating new arrangements that could overcome the inherent difficulties. Addressing institutional gaps is the bet Decree 8,243, of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014, has made. The decree establishes the PNPS and SNPS. In her analysis, Almeida (2017) demonstrates how the its text invests heavily in different institutional dimensions: by preserving the deliberative autonomy of spaces, ensuring diversity and turnover among the committee members, giving free access by stakeholders to participatory bodies, providing for the publication of acts and the use of social networks as mechanisms for dialogue and dissemination, establishing mechanisms for responding to the decisions being taken, and finally, establishing a Governmental Committee for Social Participation. It also promotes a series of connections between the councils themselves - such as the Inter-Council Forum - and between councils and other participatory institutions - like shared calendars, reports, among others.

The decree, however, is more reticent when it comes to affording mechanisms of authorization and accountability, with their effects for enhancing decision-making and systemic coordination. Although it intends to bring new life to participatory spaces and pluralize them, the document does not regulate the procedures for the election of participants<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the impact of decisions on public policies and the participation of other related public policy areas are still not clearly mapped out. Finally, the text is silent on manners of coordination with the legislative power (Almeida, 2017).

The difficulty in advancing the aforementioned issues may reinforce the idea (conveyed by the debates about the decree and its repercussions) of an incompatibility between the institutional arrangements of coalition presidentialism and the participatory system. The processes of social participation and the greater influence of participatory decisions on public policy outcomes could be seen as a "usurpation" of legislative powers - or even an undue appreciation of inherently bureaucratic technical issues. If this perspective is, at the very least, contradictory when one considers the post-1988 Brazilian context (in which numerous laws have created participatory arenas), it also illustrates a little-explored, intrinsic, and paradoxical aspect to institutional reform solutions: that is, how the reforms' success depends on their approval by the instituted powers, which in turn involves a barrier to radical and structural change. Despite the criticism towards the institutional crisis approach, solutions for overcoming the crisis through institutional change call attention to the possibility of a gradual and even sectoral transformation of institutions, through the incorporation of new arrangements, rules, and action repertoires. Thus, such solutions establish an important counterpoint to the structural crisis perception.

### *Political crisis*

Unlike previous perspectives, the political crisis view conveys an agency dimension as something inherent to the democratic process. It highlights the capacity to transform structures through coalition formation and through the performance of actors from outside of the institutional framework. It also argues that the contextual variable of the Brazilian political conjuncture established a sort of "window of opportunity" that enabled opportunism, as well

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10 Or another equivalent mechanism. Although the decree mentions elections, it still allows for the nomination of participants by the executive power, in both councils and conferences. In our view, this does not solve the problems surrounding the fact that participation legitimacy arises from the state apparatus and not from society.



as bold endeavours combined with actions to protect spurious groups, thus producing an unimaginable imbalance based on the existing institutional framework (Figueiredo and Limongi, 2017; Santos and Szwako, 2016).<sup>11</sup>

The main conjunctural aspects identified by the authors are: (i) the political polarization established in the country after the June 2013 demonstrations - which, as we have seen, opened a symbolic framing dispute that gradually made the discourse of rejection of both institutions and the Workers Party more hegemonic; (ii) the outcome of the 2014 elections, which reflected the country's underlying polarization, failed to establish a new majority coalition and was openly challenged by the losing side; (iii) the advance of corruption investigations, which revealed major scandals and threatened political groups of all spectra involved in the allegations; (iv) the inability of Dilma Rousseff's government to deal with political and economic issues throughout its mandate, but especially post-2014;<sup>12</sup> (v) the impeachment, based on flimsy institutional foundations and articulated by extra-party coalitions, that brought together: voices of dissent stemming from street demonstrations, groups seeking protection against the fight against corruption, and groups for which the removal of the PT was a priority above all others; finally, (vi), the illegitimate government that was instituted after the impeachment and imposed an unelected economic reform agenda, composed of groups that had been notably involved in corruption scandals (Figueiredo and Limongi, 2017; Santos and Szwako, 2016).

Despite their different theoretical perspectives, both Figueiredo and Limongi, and Santos and Szwako's analyses agree that coalition presidentialism is an institutional arrangement capable of guaranteeing stability, something it has done in the first two and a half decades of its existence. The analyses also attribute responsibility for the "insidious use of institutions" (Santos and Szwako, 2016, p. 115) to opportunistic or adventurous actors that undermine the system's legitimacy without breaking institutionality. To a greater or lesser extent, a parallel can be drawn between these analyses and that of Levitsky and Ziblatt's (2018) on how the breakdown of well-established unwritten rules of American democracy ended up placing that system at a risk of deterioration through the action of political leaders, in a scenario of deep polarization.

The solution proposed by the political crisis interpretation is to set up coalitions that are able to establish new political consensus among the elites, whether in spite of the polarization, or by overcoming it (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Santos and Szwako, 2016). According to Santos and Szwako, these consensus could be created with the transposition of "watertight ideological purisms", that is, by establishing bridges with "all shades of democratic voices committed to minimally civilized and egalitarian values". The result would be the formation of a new center, which would serve as a basis for the reconstruction of an institutional arrangement - combining and balancing mechanisms of representation and participation (p. 120). Although Figueiredo and Limongi (2017) do not propose a definite solution, their analysis seems to indicate that the agents' commitment and accountability to the current democratic system is involved.

The political crisis interpretation complements the other theoretical views by highlighting the consequences of political actions and reintroducing agency as a relevant source of

11 Avritzer's account of the crisis, formulated in the works *Democracy Impasses* (2016) and *Pendulum of Democracy* (2019), although referenced in terms of the institutional crisis, encompasses elements related to coalitions and the agency of political actors, denouncing the relationship between elites and certain institutions as one of the factors that generate periodic movements of democratic regression in the country.

12 There is evidence of chauvinistic dealings regarding President Dilma's action, whose chances of success were always less than those of her male counterparts.

institutional change. This perspective provides a final outline to the readings on the crisis of Brazilian democracy, indicating that both institutional and non-institutional action is required in order to overcome it. At the non-institutional level, it is necessary to establish a political coalition that will bring back the system's original values (here, resistances are present in both representative and participatory spaces) as well as manners of social mobilization, so as to constantly challenge institutions (activism, resistances, denouncing selectivity of institutions, the domination inherent to any system). With regard to the institutional context, on the other hand, we highlight the capacity for change introduced by sporadic or structural reforms, and their unintended consequences.

The following section seeks to bring all these strands together by exploring the literature on institutionalization, thus placing that debate within the context of socio-state interactions and interpreting their analytical categories as possible connectors between the dynamics of activism, representation and social participation.

### **Institutionalization and Deinstitutionalization of Social Participation: a relational perspective**

When analyzing the institution of the PNPS established by Decree 8.243/2014 and the extinction of participatory instances promoted by Decree 9.759/2019, one must also look at social participation in light of institutionalization studies. By understanding these instruments as part of broader processes of, respectively, institutionalization and deinstitutionalization in the participatory framework, we can adopt a radically relational and mutually constitutive perspective of the dynamics through which the interests and values of social and state agents are crystallized as institutions (Gurza Lavalle et al., 2019). Moreover, as Szwako and Gurza Lavalle (2019: 145) point out, "(...) if the understanding of specific institutionalization processes obeys temporal and spatially delimited processes, the analytical questions are of general relevance".

This analysis is fuelled by the theoretical conception of networks as systems of connections between public and private spheres in the implementation of public policies (Katzenstein, 1978). As such, the field of institutionalization falls within the scope of socio-state interactions. The state, from this perspective, is not only an arena in which social actors dispute ideas, but also itself an agent for dispute, with the capacity to act autonomously, affecting the political culture and the distribution of resources (Skocpol, 1985, p. 21). Civil society, in turn, can be understood as consisting of open communication flows, created by coalitions of interlocutors in search of influence and collective guidance, in political, economic, and/or civil matters (Emirbayer and Sheller, 1998).

In this context, the actors' agency is theoretically conceived as temporarily inserted within the process of social engagement, informed by the past (habitual), oriented towards the future (creative) and guided by the present (contingent) (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The possibilities of agency state actors have are directly related to the concept of state capacity, and mutually constituted by the agency possibilities of social actors, embedded in the broader notion of action repertoires (Alonso, 2012; Bringel, 2012); or, organizationally, in the notion of civil society's acting capacities (Gurza Lavalle, Castello and Bichir, 2008).

Like the concept of temporal agency, institutionalization is a historical, contingent, and creative process. It is historical because it consists of a dispute of practices and ideas in a given social moment and, therefore, it is subject to conditions produced by past relationships, macro social institutions, and a particular political and economic structure with unevenly distributed resources. It is contingent because this dispute is uncertain, i.e., it produces unanticipated results and is subject to unintended consequences and present restrictions. Finally, it is creative

because the actors' capacity for agency – the ability to produce new elements - is acknowledged.

In the context of the interaction between state and society, the following elements may constitute specific institutional sedimentations or *fits*:<sup>13</sup> public policy instruments, laws, programs, instances, and organizations, as well as unwritten rules and strategic frameworks with a symbolic dimension resulting from socio-state interaction. Through them, certain groups of actors and their action repertoires acquire the capacity of agency for a certain time; contrastingly, from another analytical outlook, they favourably activate institutions' selectivity (Gurza Lavalle et al, 2019; Szwako and Gurza Lavalle, 2019).

The articulation of various types of fit (horizontal variation) at different hierarchical levels (vertical variation) is, therefore, capable of producing agency domains - fields of competence in which the ability of certain actors to act is recognized and favoured (Gurza Lavalle *et al*, 2019, p. 52). The agency domains' approach ultimately replaces the contextual and exogenous approach of institutionalization processes through the dynamic and relational focus of political processes, by portraying the conditions that affect such mechanisms, i.e., regularities in the institutionalizing processes – thus becoming both the producers and the products of socio-state interactions (p. 53).

The authors indicate at least three types of mechanisms that are possible in this scenario. They are: (i) institutional mechanisms that are related to features of political institutions, such as state permeability (Marques, 2012), the party, electoral composition of legislative powers – presently understood as the institutional arrangements affecting the relationship between executive and legislative - and state capacities, which in turn can be administrative, relational and symbolic (Pires and Gomide, 2016; Szwako and Gurza Lavalle, 2019); (ii) relational mechanisms, pertaining to the connecting structures established between civil society networks, permeating the state through protests (contentious activism), policy communities, bureaucratic activism or even coalitions; (iii), social mechanisms, which relate to the capacity of civil society actors, especially Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and SMs. The latter category includes the expertise, specialization and learning within different areas of collective action, as well as various organizational forms - like social mobilization, operationalization of public policy, experimenting with formats or instruments, and managing different types of complex organizations. Finally, it is vital to mention that social and state capacities are perceived as both mechanisms acting upon institutionalization and as products of the institutionalization process itself, an analytical overlap that corroborates the model's radically relational and mutually constitutive perspective (Bichir *et al.*, 2017; Gurza Lavalle *et al*, 2019).

According to Abers, Tatagiba and Silva (2018), relations between social movements and public policies can be understood from two analytical viewpoints, namely that of political regimes and of public policy subsystems. By dialoguing with the relational perspective, these viewpoints allow us to describe participation processes and to explain the changes occurring in different organizations, movements, and policies. Political regimes are comprehended on the basis of the “relations between politically relevant actors that regulate the access to discussions and government decisions”, thus creating opportunities and/or obstacles to social movements'

13 The concept of “fit” was used by Skopcol (1992) to denote some sort of point of access to government or state institutions, ignited by well-organized and resourceful groups such as corporations, movements, civil society organizations or lobbies, to gain leverage in order to encourage, shape, deny or even block certain rules or pieces of legislation. The concept was recent reclaimed by the Brazilian literature as an institutional materialization of state-society relations, similar to a plug-in connection (Gurza Lavalle et al., 2019).

performance. Meanwhile, policy subsystems are related to “the specific configurations of power for each policy sector, which grant different conditions of access to and influence over these sectors to social movements” (p.17). According to their position in the power structure within regimes and/or subsystems, political actors access different material and symbolic resources. They do so by interacting with these relational structures, influencing policies, and creating new relations between civil society and the state – amidst their very heterogeneity. In other words, through interactions between society and the state, actors seek to generate various opportunities and/or constraints for the insertion and performance of civil society in different policy sectors.

It should be noted that the perspective of different types of fit (horizontal variation) situated at different levels within the subsystems and regimes (vertical variation) resounds, to a certain extent, with some of the elements highlighted by the literature over the Brazilian democratic crisis. The limits of the institutional focus emphasized by the structural aspect, for example, are connected to the recognition of the sociogenesis of institutions. The notion of fit, in turn, is a midrange institution that can promote sectoral or incremental change, as claimed by the institutional perspective. Furthermore, the incompatibility of the representative (coalition presidentialism) and participatory (participatory institutions) hybrid institutional arrangement leads us to reflect on what types of fits were created in Brazil in recent years, and where they were located vertically. It also begs the question of what kind of statal and social capacities were generated, either in terms of participation or within executive-legislative relations. Ultimately, the notion of political crisis draws attention to agency of the various actors involved as well as the relational configuration and its effects overall. This outlook harmonizes the notion of political crisis with Avritzer’s (2019) *longue durée* analysis, given how the de-stabilizing actors are not seen as a contextual product of the current moment, but as having been influencing political processes throughout various democratic periods.

When following this line of thought, participatory institutions are seen as fits that are historically created in various (but not in all) policy subsystems. Such subsystems have permitted, after 1988 – even more so after 2003, at a federal level – the occurrence of agency domains that were inclusive of civil society (in regard to decision-making and increasing state permeability). This process was accompanied by the development of a number of other types of engagement; notably, the holding of public office by activists, the transformation of bureaucratic segments, the creation of instruments for intersectoral coordination, and the expansion of internal and external control, among others. All of these endeavours undoubtedly influenced the social and state capacities of the organs, instances, SMs and CSOs, coalitions and networks that permeated the subsystems (Abers and von Bülow, 2011; Gurza Lavallo and von Bülow, 2014; Pires and Gomide, 2016, Dowbor, 2019). However, up until the changes that began to take effect in 2013, the political regime was largely indifferent to the subsystems’ transformation. It tended to maintain its logic of action, based on the mechanism of forming a majority, characteristic of the coalition presidentialism model. As such, it required ever-widening support bases to counteract the growing number of parties and increasing fragmentation, as discussed in the previous section (Avritzer, 2016; Freitas, 2016).

The PNPS initiative, especially in the case of the SNPS, sought to expand the participatory fits to other subsystems, partially raising them to the scope of the political regime, although not as successfully as one might expect. We recall the statement of Pedro Pontual (Gurza Lavallo and Szwako, 2014), a key participant in the PNPS proposition, when he indicated participation as a method of government:

“Despite all the heterogeneity, a greater number of councils were created around public policy; we had a huge diversification in conferences’ practices, we saw the expansion of public ombudsmen, but the government had to make a quality leap in two directions, relying not only on the consolidation of these

already established channels of social participation. The government had to turn social participation into a method of government. (...) It is a question of constructing a set of guidelines, to be institutionalized at some point and that make clear the State's commitment to promote social participation. An expression of this commitment is the arrangement of institutionalities in the form of a system” (p. 98; p. 101, our translation).

The proposal, however, was not effectively implemented, seen as Decree 8,243 opened up conflicts (or even evidenced pre-existent disputes) between different actors in the spheres of the executive, the legislative, civil society,<sup>14</sup> and the media. This anticipated the disruption of the center-left coalition that had maintained political stability in the previous years. The same reasoning can be applied to the case of the initiative to do away with participatory instances, later produced by the Bolsonaro government: from the political regime’s perspective, it sought to destroy the participatory institutions already established within public policies’ most varied subsystems. This move encountered some resistance, as we shall see in the section below.

### **Institutionalization trajectories: instruments, supports and resistances**

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, the federal government issued Decree 8,243, establishing the PNPS and SNPS. Signed by President Dilma Rousseff, the General Secretariat of the Presidency (SGPR), the Ministry of Planning, and the Comptroller General of the Union, the instrument sought to expand, improve and systematically outline the set of participatory institutions in the Federal Government. Although it was able to advance more in some aspects than others, the decree was celebrated as a vital effort to further develop the effectiveness of Brazilian participatory institutions as a whole, through measures to democratize their internal dynamics, representative features and influence, cooperation and policymaking capacity (Almeida, 2017).

Within ten days of the decree’s publication, there had already been a strong reaction from the media and federal legislature. Several bills were presented, all aimed at suppressing it (PDC 4.192/2014, PDC 1.494/2014 and PDC 1.495/2014), and two draft legislative decrees were put forth with the same purpose - PDL 117, authored by Senator Álvaro Dias (PSDB), presented on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014, and PDL 1,491, authored by Congressmen Mendonça Filho and Ronaldo Caiado (DEM), presented on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2014 and approved by the House on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2014 (the draft was then sent to the Senate without further processing). Viana (2015) indicates that these projects’ recurrent justification was how the participatory decree was an attempt to divest the legislative of its attributions. The justification of the approved project states that “the presidential decree corrupts the heart of the representative regime, one of the pillars of the democratic rule of law” (p.98). By examining the project’s arguments, the strong objections of Members of Parliament to the PNPS and SNPS are made clear. Other mentioned reasonings were the proximity to the electoral period and unease over the establishment of the PNPS by decree, removing the power of decision-making from the representative houses (Almeida, 2017; Magalhães, 2016). On the other hand, the presentation of Bill 8,048/2014 by PSOL parliamentarians addressed some of those criticisms, basically reissuing Decree 8,243/204 as a legislative initiative.

The media’s discussion, meanwhile, was mainly focused on the dispute between participation and representation, with some media channels taking the stand that social participation in a representative democracy should occur solely through elected representatives. Some medial channels went even further in that line of reasoning, declaring

14 Even in the field of social movements, it is notable that some movements organized at a national level did not invest in participatory institutions and in their effectiveness, prioritizing other repertoires of action and interaction with the government (Gurza Lavalle and Szwako, 2014, p. 100).

the Decree to be Bolivarian or Chavist-inspired (Avritzer, 2014; Viana, 2015). The instrument's defense was confined to the progressive media and communication channels of civil society movements. However, it is important to mention that, although some channels defended the PNPS's advances, they also expressed dissatisfaction over its elaboration process, rejecting the governmental narrative that the decree had been jointly created with civil society (Magalhães, 2016).

In another move that would strengthen the discourse of institutional rejection in 2013, conservative sectors of organized civil society spoke out against the PNPS. The representative of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, in fact, went on to reinforce the theory of the supposedly Bolivarian character of the initiative during his testimony at a Public Hearing, held in the Senate. In his view, the decree was clearly harmful to democracy, not the other way around.

From the point of view of bureaucracy, there was no consensus about the instrument either. Although it is true that the decree was elaborated with broad participation and effort on the part of bureaucratic activists in the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic (SGPR), the same enthusiasm could not be attributed to other Federal Administration organs, nor to the epistemic network formed by the Public Administration, Public Policy and similar fields. This is demonstrated by the words of Mr. José Matias Pereira, Professor of Public Administration at the University of Brasilia and former employee of the Institute of Applied Economic Research - IPEA (1975 - 1995), who spoke at a public hearing held at the Federal Senate CCJ. In his presentation, Pereira was against the PNPS, as he believed the measure would disrupt public administration at the time. SPGR Minister Gilberto de Carvalho's own speech on that occasion, despite having historically contextualized the importance of social participation, played down PNPS's effects, indicating that it was merely a tool for organizing existing instances. Furthermore, the minister demonstrated certain timidity when faced with the conservative reaction to the decree, revealing how the government had not anticipated such vigorous opposition. The research also shows internal disagreements within the staff of the SGPR itself with regard to the decision to institute the structural policy by decree (Magalhães, 2016).

In the context of the legislative dispute, resistance to the opposition forces appeared in the aforementioned Bill 8,048/2014. The bill attempted to reintroduce the PNPS through legislative terms, but also by obstructing projects that sought to suppress the decree, employing regimental mechanisms provided by coalition presidentialism. The aforementioned public hearing was, controversially, both an instance of participation and an example of some of its shortcomings. It contained historically situated and legally based defences of social participation, such as the presentation by Professor of Law, Dr Dalmo de Abreu Dallari, of the University of São Paulo, and theoretically and empirically grounded manifestations, like the testimony of Professor of Political Science Dr Leonardo Avritzer, of the Federal University of Minas Gerais. The ongoing political dispute was materialized in an instructive way, but the discussion was mostly ineffective when it came to the process's ultimate result.

Although decree 8.243/2014 was never halted by the Senate, the PNPS and SNPS were not finally implemented. This was a result of the political discussion being rapidly transformed by the electoral period and by the subsequent impeachment issue, culminating in the withdrawal of the government that had proposed the policy in the first place. The decree, although unproductive, remained in force until April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, when it was repealed by Decree 9,759.

The new decree would extinguish several participatory institutions (specifically, collegiate bodies) of different public policies at the federal level. Also called "revogaço" by some movements of civil society, Decree 9.759/2019 generated considerable dispute in the media

and in the legislative, albeit with less repercussions than the dispute over the PNPS. Within the Congress, the initiative was the target of two Legislative Decree Projects aimed at halting its effects: PDL 113, of April 12<sup>th</sup> 2019, approved by the labour committee but awaiting the appointment of a rapporteur on the Justice and Constitution committee (CCJ), and PDL 24 of April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019, which currently awaits the official stance of the CCJ.

The decree has also been the target of a direct action of unconstitutionality (ADI 6121), filed by the Workers Party (PT) jointly with social movements and the Federal Public Defender's Office. The Brazilian Supreme Court had pronounced its opinion, declaring the unconstitutionality of dismissing collegiate bodies that were legally established. In the case of the Public Administration, both the Attorney General's Office and the Federal Public Defender's Office issued technical recommendations and criticisms regarding some of the measures adopted by the “revogação” initiative.

As for the media, although the decree attracted a note of praise from *Estadão*,<sup>15</sup> public opinion was generally contrary to it. Within the arenas of social participation, some bodies - like the Public Notice of the National Human Rights Council - issued motions of rejection. In addition, a few policy conferences have since been freely organized by civil society, despite the absence of calls by the Federal Government. This demonstrates extra-institutional reaction and, to a certain extent, embodies the legacy of previous processes.

Concerning activism, various civil society organizations (including *Transparência Brasil*<sup>16</sup>), unions, federations, working groups and social movements have also issued notes, letters of repudiation, or technical notes criticizing the decree and warning of its dangers. There have also been collective actions, networks, and fronts of resistance, such as the campaign on social networks *Brasil Precisa de Conselhos* (Brazil Needs Councils),<sup>17</sup> organized and mobilized by academics working in that field of research. The situation has been monitored on the virtual platform, “Democracy and participation” (set up as a reaction to the dismantling of the collegiate bodies). Some protests were registered, such as the national mobilization against the extinction of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security, called *Banquetaço* (a political act, held on February 27<sup>th</sup> in more than forty Brazilian cities, in which meals were cooked and offered on the streets<sup>18</sup>). Finally, we highlight the passing of the 128/2019 bill, that re-establishes the PNPS (already approved by the Public Administration and Public Service Commission), and the recent vigorous dispute between different social groups over *conselhos tutelares*, that is, paid elected positions distributed in every Brazilian city to support the rights of children and young people.

In light of the above, one can see that the trajectories of support and opposition to the PNPS institutionalization initiative, on the one hand, and Decree 9.759/2019, on the other, depict varied repertoires of more or less institutionalized collective action. The following points stand out: (i) the participatory construction of the PNPS was a process permeated by difficulties that, in the landmark year of 2013, reflects the dissonance between government and civil society activists, weakening both the quality and defense mobilization around the final instrument; (ii) the isolation of Congress from the discussions, the elections’ proximity, the

15 Estadão, Notas e Informações: Poucos e Bons Conselhos - 16/05/2019, in: <https://opiniao.estadao.com.br/noticias/notas-e-informacoes/poucos-e-bons-conselhos,70002792839>

16 Transparência Brasil. 2019. Nota sobre o Decreto n.9758/2019. Governo Fechado. Blog da Transparência Brasil. 12 de abril de 2019.

17 Teixeira, Ana Claudia; Bezerra, Carla de Paiva; Silva, Marcelo Kunrath., 2019. Participação e democracia: o Brasil precisa de conselhos. Nexo Jornal. Maio. In: <https://www.nexojornal.com.br/ensaio/2019/Participa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-e-democracia-%20o-Brasil-precisa-de-conselhos>>.

18 Abrasco. Banquetaço. in: <https://www.abrasco.org.br/site/outras-noticias/movimentos-sociais/banquetaco-mobilizou-mais-de-40-cidades-pela-alimentacao-saudavel-e-pelo-retorno-do-conseja/39816/> (accessed in 10/10/2019)

weakening of the post-2013 government base and the lack of consensus within this base over the initiative led to a rejection of the PNPS and hampered the government's reaction to sustaining the measure; (iii) institutional resistance initiatives in favour of the PNPS were sufficient to prevent their effects from being cancelled, but not to guarantee their effectiveness; (iv) resistance measures against Decree 9.759/2019, both institutional and extra-institutional, have so far proved ineffective in reversing the social participative fabric existent in many policy subsystems; and (v), in both cases, the role of the media reflected the misappropriation of social participation by the elites and the general population.

## Concluding remarks

This article analyzed the Brazilian political participatory system in the context of the crisis of democracy the country has faced. It sought to outline potential ways to overcome the crisis, strategies that involve dynamics of social participation. To this end, a review of the Brazilian literature on the subject was carried out, highlighting three perspectives - structural, institutional, and political - which we subscribed in a complementary way. We then explored the vision of participatory institutions in light of the theoretical field of institutionalization, from the relational perspective of fits and agency domains. Finally, the trajectory of the PNPS institutionalization initiative through Decree 8.243/2014 and the deinstitutionalization or deconstruction of participation, through Decree 9.759/2019, were examined.

Following this analysis, it is imperative to acknowledge that the participatory framework that has been created in an innovative way in Brazil was unable to prevent the democratic deconstruction that the country is currently going through, in terms of both institutional and symbolic aspects. On the other hand, the participatory system has proliferated to such an extent that, so far, it has been able to secure instances and narratives of resistance, not only within civil society but also as consolidated political platforms in the legislature or as state capacities that, having expanded the permeability of the state apparatus, now constitute resilient barriers to the ongoing deconstruction of democracy. Those barriers, however, tend to lie on subsystems levels, since the participatory fits have not historically reached regime institutions and, therefore, are constantly threatened by underlying authoritarian forces present from within.

That said, the solutions articulated by the different views on the crisis are the product of various combinations, built around three main elements: (i) confrontation with the current regime, whether extra-institutionally, by denouncing its authoritarian character and its exclusionary domination (expressed not only in government actions but also in the hierarchizing social structures themselves), or institutionally, through the democratic experimentation of inclusive arrangements distant from the central core; (ii) the implementation of political and institutional reforms that reorganize the bases of access to decision-making bodies, articulating the relationship between the majority formation system and participatory institutions in a more balanced way; and (iii), the reconstruction of consensus and/or democratic agreements between (more or less broadened) political elites, re-establishing a political center that is capable of producing new regularity and governance, as well as removing antidemocratic discourses.

In this context, the literature on institutionalization can help us translate the proposed solutions into medium-range analytical categories. Through this reading, it is argued that Brazilian participatory institutions have proliferated as partially inclusive fits within the framework of some policy subsystems, while finding strong impediments to establishing themselves as fits within the political regime, significantly reducing their ability to establish embracing agency domains. This perspective highlights some substantial criticisms of participatory institutions, especially when they seek to break their micro-networks of action,



calling for broader and transversal decision-making effectiveness. Whether in the context of the negotiation of majorities established in the executive-legislative relationship, which involves the reorganization of the political center, or in the authoritarian dynamics and politics' denial adopted by the Bolsonaro government, merely institutional and political solutions to the crisis do not seem to contemplate the participative fits intended by the IPs and the PNPS project.

Thus, the feasibility of a democratic project to overcome the political crisis - a project which could establish an effective complementarity between representation and participation - seems to require the joint action of various actors in institutional and extra-institutional spheres. In other words, it can be said that the radicality intended by the participatory project can never be fully realized without the constant interaction of activist, collective, institutional, and political repertoires. Analyzing participatory institutions as particular institutional fits may be a productive way to approach these phenomena.

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## Ecological and democratic crises in the history of Manfredonia, Italy

**Giulia Malavasi,<sup>1</sup>** Società per l'epidemiologia e la prevenzione Giulio A. Maccacaro Impresa sociale srl, Italy

**Abstract:** Ecological and democratic crises are known to be closely linked. In the history of Manfredonia (Italy), the relationship between them has been revealed as a complex set of dynamics: on the one hand, its environmental degradation determined mistrust in democratic institutions; on the other, during the years of the struggle against the Manfredonian petrochemical plant, the local environmental movement experienced significant democratic participation. To analyze the connection between environmental and democratic crises, the history of Manfredonia is examined by introducing some of the concepts elaborated by Environmental Justice. These are: its broad definition of the environment; the matter of democratic participation in the use of the territory; the issue of narrative injustice, which leads to the need to overcome mainstream narratives through participatory historical research. The research intends to enhance local knowledge, promote shared authority, and produce tools for the population to initiate their own democratic processes of participation.

**Keywords:** Ecological crisis, democracy, environmental justice, participatory history, Manfredonia.

### Introduction

Ecological and democratic crises are, in general, closely linked. Environmental problems dictate new challenges for democratic institutions and for the theory of democracy itself. The vast literature on the subject illustrates how the Humanities have explored these issues from multiple perspectives and through various elaborate approaches.

Even a simple overview can register this matter's complexity. Studies about social movements – i.e., indigenous, early social forum movements born in opposition to the WTO, or recent climate strikes – have underscored how such organizations have repeatedly challenged consolidated democratic institutions by denouncing the interaction between the dismantling of local democratic powers, the attacks on social rights, and local/global ecological crises (*apud* Santos, 2002; Shiva, 2005; Ciervo, 2010; Santos, 2013; Shiva V. and Shiva K., 2019). At the same time, environmental movements have played a crucial role in redefining democratic processes (*apud* Della Porta and Diani, 2004; Podestà and Vitale, 2011; Bulsei, 2013). Different democratic practices have been theorized and subsequently undertaken in localized contexts, such as *le débat public* in France (*apud* Bobbio, 2010) or the *deliberative*

<sup>1</sup> Società per l'epidemiologia e la prevenzione Giulio A. Maccacaro Impresa sociale srl, Italy. Graduated in Contemporary History at the University of Florence. In 2016-2017, was part of the project "Ambiente Salute Manfredonia" in collaboration with the social enterprise "Società per l'epidemiologia e la prevenzione Giulio A. Maccacaro".

*democracy*, implemented as a decision-making process in Turin (*apud* Bobbio, 2002). Grassroots movements, in turn, are active about environmental hazards and have been experimenting with citizen participation through laboratories for participatory democracy (*apud* Santos and Nunes, 2006). Finally, sociological studies have elaborated on the implications of the issue of uncertainty as a key component in environmental matters, and its connection with the role of communication and democratic participation (*apud* De Marchi *et al.*, 2001).

Among other historical studies, Environmental History has significantly contributed to our understanding of the present global ecological crisis from a historical perspective. Through the dialogue with other disciplines and fields of historical research, it explores the relationships between human beings and the environment in their historical dimension (*apud* Armiero and Barca, 2004; Agnoletti and Neri Serneri, 2014). The debate on Ecological Economics issues (*apud* Martinez-Alier, 1990), furthermore, has led to the inclusion of natural resources as productive factors in the analysis – that is, as having active roles in the production of economic value. Meanwhile, economic production has also begun to be considered as a historical process of transformation of nature (*apud* Armiero and Barca, 2004).

In this view, the analysis of economic processes, including the relationship between energy use patterns and the Modern Economic Growth, as well as the history of urban-industrial systems, cannot be seen solely as the progressive history of unlimited economic growth, granted by unrestricted energy and natural resource consumption. Environmental and social costs should also be taken into perspective (*apud* Corona, 2004; Adorno and Neri Serneri, 2009; Barca, 2014a), seen as “the increasing number of ecological distribution conflicts around the world is ultimately caused by the changing metabolism of the economy, in terms of growing flows of energy and materials” (Martinez-Alier, 2018). With these premises, an environmental history of industrial development is also a history of the difficult relationship between the actors that cause pollution and the communities involved (*apud* Corona, 2004). Moreover, this kind of study can shed some light on the history of environmental movements and their political proposals, as well as on their contributions to democratic practices.

This paper aims to present the history of Manfredonia (Italy, Apulia region), where the fourth largest petrochemical plant in Italy was located. It seeks to analyze how the history of the community – which has recently suffered an environmental catastrophe due to this kind of industrial production (*apud* Malavasi, 2018) – evidences the link between the ecological crisis and democratic processes. This work also means to contribute to the discussion of the following questions: how can a historical study analyze social and environmental impacts of industrial settlements and help open up new fields of democratic participation and narrative justice by voicing popular resistance movements’ agendas? How can history offer us the tools for re-appropriating the environment as a depository of localized memories?

The present paper is based on a historical study developed as a part of the “Ambiente Salute Manfredonia” multidisciplinary project. Following a brief summary of the main facts of Manfredonia’s history, to offer an overview to the reader, and an introduction on the “Ambiente Salute Manfredonia” project, the article will be structured into two main sections.

### 1. Participatory historical research in Manfredonia

In this section, I present the methodology adopted by the study and the steps that it has followed over time. I also discuss the aims of a participatory historical research such as this one: to give credit to local knowledge, promote shared authority, and provide the tools that enable a specific population to initiate democratic participation.

### 2. Ecological and democratic crises in Manfredonia

To analyze the connection between the environmental and democratic crises, Manfredonia’s history will be presently examined through the lens of some concepts elaborated

by the field of Environmental Justice. These notions are: its complex definition of the environment itself - helpful for a broader comprehension of the Manfredonian ecological crisis' social impact; its stance on local identities' lack of recognition and on the matter of democratic participation in regards to land and natural resources use (both closely linked to experiences of environmental injustice); the issue of narrative injustice, strictly associated to democracy and environmental justice matters - therefore encompassing the importance of producing an alternative narrative for the community's history.

### Manfredonia: the history of a continuous catastrophe

Manfredonia is a small city in Southern Italy (Apulia region). Its traditional economy was based on fishing, agriculture and incipient tourism until the late 1960s, when the Italian Government decided to set up the *Enichem* petrochemical plant (owned by the public oil company, ENI) just outside the city. The *Enichem* plant became operative in 1971, producing fertilizers and caprolactam. It employed some 1500 people, with another 600 workers hired by sub-contracting firms.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1976, a scrubbing tower for the synthesis of ammonia gases in the plant blew up, releasing at least 12 tons of compounds (containing arsenic) into the atmosphere. The leak's contents were revealed to the public only in the days following the explosion, and the seriousness of the accident was minimised by the plant's managers - in fact, when the arsenic cloud emerged, the director declared it was only water vapor. The complaint that the workers' factory committee addressed to the Mayor, however, would later reveal the extent of its dramatic polluting power.

Over the next few years, in addition to routinely unchecked pollution levels, several other accidents occurred, some of which seriously alarmed the local population. Especially notable was an ammonia leak in 1978 that caused mass evacuation from the city, as well as the release of ammonia, sulphur dioxide, and nitrous gases into the air in the following years. That is probably why, during the participatory historical research project, Manfredonia's inhabitants decided to describe their trajectory as a *continuous catastrophe*.

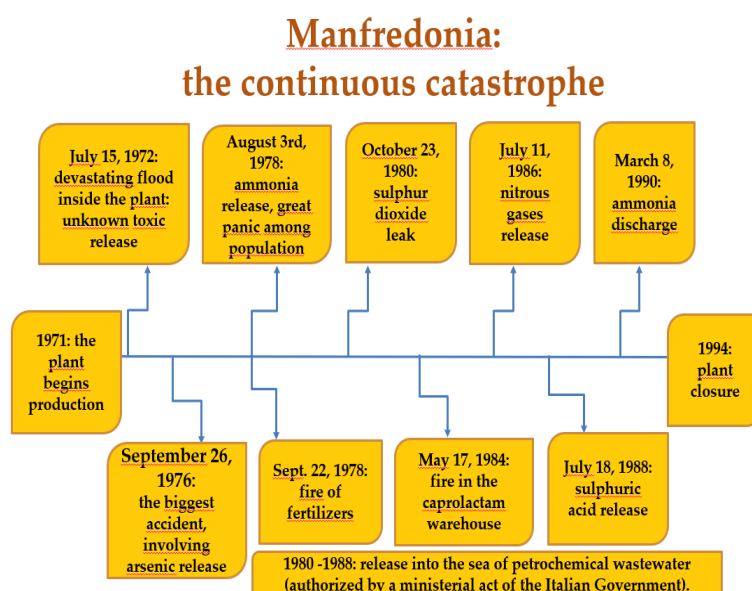


Figure 1 – Manfredonia: the continuous catastrophe

Source: the authors' own elaboration.



In 1988, the citizens began to react, when three events led to a large strike against the petrochemical firm. These occurrences were: firstly, the decision of the regional government to allow the construction of an incinerator for industrial waste inside the plant; secondly, the legal action following the death of dolphins in the area, due to the release of industrial wastewater into the local sea, by ships financed by the *Enichem* factory;<sup>2</sup> finally, the Italian Government's decision to redirect the Deep Sea Carrier (a ship with toxic cargo that needed to be dismantled, originally destined for Nigeria) to Manfredonia's plant.

Mobilization and civic struggles began in September 1988 and continued for two years. During that period, the real extent of the pollution - until then unacknowledged by the population - was revealed. People shared information about the plant's production methods and significant opposition against the factory arose. Thousands of individuals belonging to different social strata got involved in the demonstrations.

Women played a crucial role in the struggle. For two years, the *Earth's Vestals* (*Vestali della Terra*) fought in defense of the environment and public health. The Citizen Women's Movement (*Movimento Cittadino Donne*) was made up of women with different social and cultural backgrounds; many of them were teachers, but housewives and shopkeepers also took part. Women organized a series of events called *University in the square* (*Università in piazza*), aimed at spreading environmental and democratic awareness among the locals.

The environmental movement that resulted from such struggles, the *Movimento Cittadino di Manfredonia*, would achieve some remarkable results. The first of them was stopping the arrival of the Deep Sea Carrier, named the *Ship of poisons* (*Nave dei veleni*) by locals. The construction of an industrial incinerator within the plant was stopped as well. The popular movement also led to the establishment of a Ministerial Commission in 1989, whose purpose was to enquire about pollution in Manfredonia. The opposition to the petrochemical firm, however, would generate deep conflict within the community and families, creating division between the movement's activists and workers worried about losing their jobs.

In addition to the environmental organization, Manfredonia had another crucial experience of working-class environmentalism. It was the case of one of the plant's workers, Nicola Lovecchio, whose illness had been caused by his job in the *Enichem* factory. Lovecchio inquired about the pollutants used in the plant and, thanks to the information he collected together with his oncologist, the plant's managers were put on trial in 1997. The trial revealed that many workers like Nicola were dying at the time due to the chemical products used inside the factory. The massive arsenic contamination thanks to the accident in 1976 and the continuous dissemination of arsenic and other pollutants during the production process came to light. Nevertheless, all the plant's managers were acquitted, since the origin of the arsenic present in the workers' blood – that is, whether it was due to the petrochemical pollution or to other factors – could not be proven. On the contrary, the Judge presiding over the case would state that such elevated arsenic levels could rise from an excess of shellfish consumption.<sup>3</sup>

Deep contamination and pollution, despite affecting both the population and the environment on such a considerable scale, continued even after the plant's closure in the early 1990s. Most of the petrochemical plant has been dismantled since then, but no real clean-up activity has taken place. Arsenic, hydrocarbons, industrial toxic waste and other heavy metals remain in the soil and in the groundwater to this day, with serious impacts on the environment

<sup>2</sup> Enichem had been authorized to the release by a ministerial act of the Italian Government for eight years.

<sup>3</sup> Tribunale ordinario di Foggia-Sezione distaccata di Manfredonia, Sentenza, 5/10/2007.

and on local health (*apud* Gianicolo, Vigotti *et al.*, 2016). After the plant's closure, a second industrialization process was undertaken. Public funding financed new pollutant industries, which would also be dismantled after a few years. It was Manfredonia's "second colonization" (Di Luzio, 2003), and it left the region in worse conditions than before. This kind of industrialization process, together with the *continuous catastrophe* generated by the plant and the lack of an actual environmental clean-up, led to a silencing of the community's democratic requests and the negation of their right to have a say in Manfredonia's future.

### The research project "Ambiente Salute Manfredonia"

The historical study under discussion is part of the participatory project in environmental epidemiology "Ambiente Salute Manfredonia". From 2015 to 2017, a multidisciplinary team of epidemiologists, physicists, one sociologist, and one historian worked on the research project together with local institutions and citizens. Previous epidemiological studies on the local population's health conditions had produced unclear results, seen as they had been carried out in a brief span after the accident - after all, the latency period for diseases caused by arsenic is of more than twenty years (*apud* De Marchi, 2018). In 2015, the Mayor decided that another epidemiological study should begin, but locals regarded the project with suspicion and skepticism. The community had little confidence in the city's institutions, which had not worked well enough in the past to adequately protect their health and natural environment. Moreover, in Manfredonia, epidemiological studies' scientific outputs tended to assume precedence in terms of economic and political power, even when their results were relatively uncertain (*apud* De Marchi, 2018).

Providing scientific answers, thus, would not be sufficient in Manfredonia's case. It was necessary to share them with the local population. Therefore, the "Ambiente Salute Manfredonia" research project<sup>4</sup> was planned as a participatory study, with the citizens' active involvement and a continuous dialogue between citizens and researchers (*apud* De Marchi, Biggeri *et al.*, 2017). The community was engaged in discussing the entire research protocol, including epidemiological issues. Researchers, together with citizens (associated through the "Manfredonia Citizens' Committee") and local institutions, debated both the different scenarios the study could produce and their health policy implications in public meetings. Citizens were also systematically involved in the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data and results.

The relationship between local people and experts needed to be reframed, and consequently the scientific knowledge produced by these experts was continually questioned. The group of citizens engaged in the project produced results jointly with researchers in an "extended peer community" (*apud* Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993; De Marchi, 2018). On the other hand, researchers explained to citizens that, in all fairness, their viewpoints were not neutral, and that different perspectives could emerge among the experts.

In this study, the Humanities worked alongside epidemiology and environmental physics. History supported the other disciplines by framing the epidemiological data within a temporal context, retrieving local knowledge, and contributing to the understanding of the region's socio-economic dynamics in all their complexity. The historical study produced a collective narrative of Manfredonia's history, shared through periodical discussions with the Citizens'

<sup>4</sup> The project was financed by a contract signed in January 2015 between the National Research Council (CNR), the Manfredonia Municipality and the Local Health Unit (LHU).

Committee, as will be described in the following pages. The definition adopted to describe the environmental crisis suffered by this community was that of a *continuous catastrophe* (*apud* Malavasi, 2018).

## Participatory historical research in Manfredonia

Historical studies have recently contributed to the understanding of Italy's industrial impact by focusing on its environmental, social, political, and cultural implications. These analyses have uncovered the economic and political stakeholders involved in industrial development (industry, governors, local institutions called to rule) and have also explored the consequences of industrialization on the daily lives of workers and citizens, registering their reactions to pollution. Scientific research projects planned in polluted territories are sometimes obliged to face settings marked by widespread mistrust in science. In these contexts, science is often viewed as being distant from the population's needs and, in the worst cases, as colluding with the industrial and political powers. If considered from a historical perspective, this view can be generalized and applied to a broader scenario, that is, of all or most historical processes concerning industrial development in the Western world. In fact, historical science has often produced a dominant narrative on industrial development that ignores the citizens' experience and emphasizes economic progress without taking its social and environmental costs into account (*apud* Barca, 2011b).

Such considerations bring up the question of how one should produce history about the environmental impacts of industrial settlements on communities and popular resistance movements. One proposal could be that of making history *with* the polluted communities and not only *about* them. The historical research in Manfredonia followed this framework, and thus sought to involve citizens and give credit to their knowledge and memories. At the same time, citizens' expertise has been contextualized within the socio-economic dynamics of the industrialization process devised by Italian capitalistic growth – which, many times, led to significant consequences for both the environment and human bodies.

Citizens' participation in the historical study was achieved through four steps:

1. The retrieval of local knowledge and of people's memories. Citizens involved in the study (Manfredonia Citizens' Committee) took part in the interviews and then used their contacts to find a wider network of people, also available and wanting to be interviewed.
2. The collecting and sharing of documents and pictures kept in their homes.
3. A collective definition of categories and keywords to offer a shared interpretation of that historical process.
4. Participative discussion regarding the study's outcomes in public debates open to the whole community.

Collecting interviews was the first step taken to scrutinize the citizens' experience and engage them. The method of Oral History was utilized. Its tradition of bottom-up history (*apud* Portelli, 2007), focused on the lower classes, and interactive history (*apud* Bonomo, 2013) - consisting in dialogues between historians and the people interviewed - provided theoretical frameworks for building a collective historical narrative. Stories of individuals' recollections bring to light unknown events and tell us about the unique way they were experienced, allowing us to understand their meaning and relevance as perceived by the locals. In many of the interviews I did in Manfredonia (mostly ones with women), for instance, a family dimension of the story came to light. In several cases, interviewees highlighted the deep impact that the series of industrial accidents had on their relatives and the high state of alarm in which they had to live for a time. Another interesting issue that arose was that of collective subjectivity: women, more than men, referred to the environmental movement using the plural pronoun

“we”. Very often, they linked this collective dimension of their activism to some kind of dynamics inside their own family.

Giving credit to the citizens’ knowledge of their own history has allowed us to discover previously undisclosed facts. When researchers came to Manfredonia for further epidemiological investigations, only the arsenic accident was known to them. They would subsequently uncover a long chain of other accidents suffered by the community that had not been divulged. Likewise, women’s role in the history of their community was undervalued and not spoken about until now. Women’s view on the region’s development, with their different perspectives of the future, had also not been taken into account in the previous accounts of Manfredonia’s history.

Besides enhancing the contents of each autobiographical story, discovering unknown episodes, and bestowing relevance on people’s memories about their local history, the interviews also have the potential to highlight the manner that each tale assumed while being told. In Oral History, it is essential not only to hear what is being narrated, but *how* (*apud* Bonomo, 2013). The way an episode is remembered is in itself a historical source because it demonstrates the importance it assumes for the interviewee. The time of narration is equally important in understanding subjective meaning (*apud* Portelli, 2007). During each interview, more time would be devoted to describing something that the interviewee judged to be truly vital.

For example: Manfredonia’s episode of ammonia release in 1978 had generated great panic among the population at the time. During the sessions, it was often narrated in great detail and with big displays of emotion. People described their fear, the chaotic mass exodus from the city, their feeling of being “like mice in a trap”, as they said. Contrarily, the fire at the caprolactam’s warehouse, in 1984 – not necessarily a less serious incident, but perceived to be so at the time – had mostly been removed from memory. The only person that described it in detail was a former fireman who had worked inside the plant to contain it. This was probably due to his perception of the severe menace the fire had posed to the city (in fact, at the time, three big chlorine tanks had risked exploding).

Besides the interviews, the citizens’ participation was achieved through their engagement in collecting documents and pictures kept in their homes. Thanks to their help, it was possible to retrieve leaflets and other types of non-conventional literature, which are quite helpful to the historical re-enactment of the local environmental movement. The content of these documents was discussed with interviewees, especially when the written sources contradicted their memories and points of view about controversial topics.

Citizens played a crucial role in the definition of analytical categories during the participatory study. They gave a collective interpretation to the historical process. Keywords were shared during debates and in the diachronic reconstruction of events; the terms employed in this narrative, such as *to swallow the damage*, *continuous catastrophe*, *forbidden city*, *university in the square*, *agora*, *earth’s vestals*, *liveable development*, *institutional deceit*, *removal* (cf. *infra*), came out during the interviews and in the debates with the Citizens’ Committee.

Outcomes were often discussed during the meetings with the Citizens’ Committee and in public meetings in the City Hall, with a broad citizen quorum (also supported by online streaming). A crucial tool in this assemblage was the creation of the project’s website, seen as storing documents on the website and sharing videos of public debates allowed citizens to participate more actively.

## Manfredonia's historical study: the key milestones

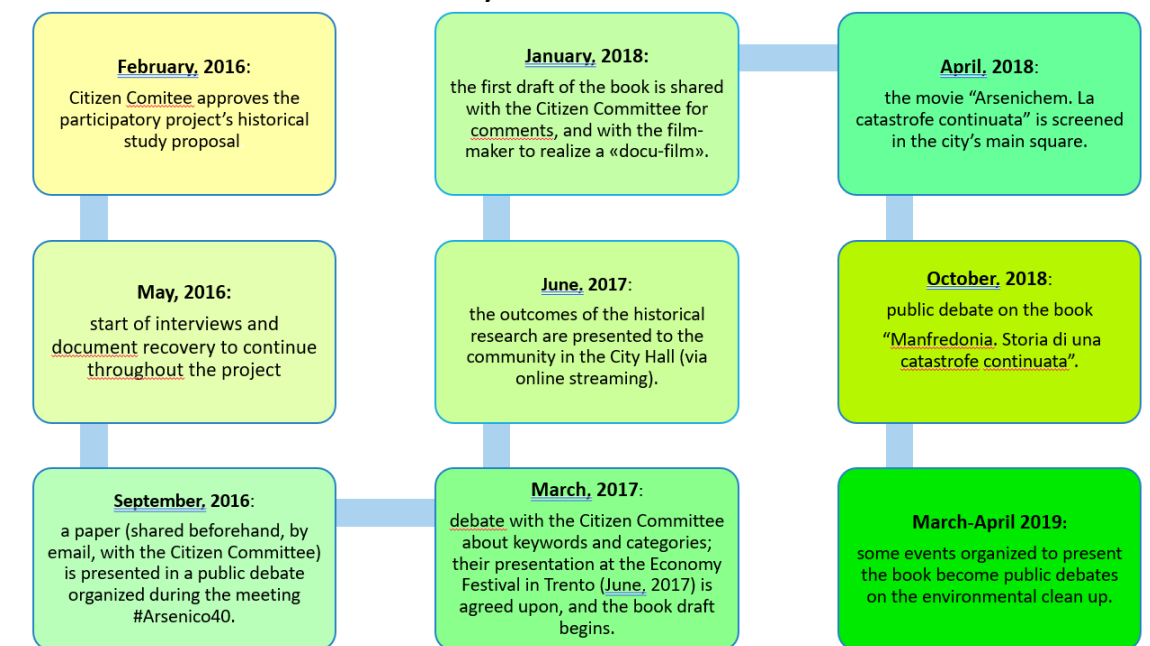


Figure 2 – Manfredonia's historical study: the key milestones

Source: the authors' own elaboration.

All these activities allowed Manfredonians to produce their own version of their community's history. As I will argue in the following pages, the continuous catastrophe suffered by them had been removed from the mainstream narrative of Italian industrial development. Through this kind of "environmental justice storytelling" (Houston, 2013), citizens engaged in the project could find a way to communicate what it meant for them to live near a petrochemical plant and the impact they had suffered in their everyday lives for many years. They could also spread their own awareness of the pollution produced by the industry and its effects within the community, passing it on to new generations.

Furthermore, a participatory historical study needs to divulge its results by adopting multiple channels of communication. If shared in content and format, the output is considered a collective work. The collective reconstruction, and the project itself, were recounted in different ways: sometimes through articles (*apud* Vigotti and Mangia, 2015; Porcu, 2015; Biggeri, Vigotti et al., 2015; Biggeri and Porcu, 2015; Gianicolo, Mangia *et al.*, 2016; Malavasi, 2016), books (*apud* Malavasi, 2018), and in one occasion, even a documentary-film made by an Italian filmmaker. These contributions have acted as tools for organizing collective memory events. During the week of functions organized for the fortieth anniversary of the arsenic accident (in September 2016), for example, collective narrative building arose in the course of different debates about the community's history and its relationship with the petrochemical plant. A whole day was then dedicated to this, involving schools and a theatre performance over the women's movement. Another important episode was the screening of the documentary-film "Arsenichem. La catastrofe continuata", which took place in the City Hall Square.

Some of the public events organized during the last year to present the book written on this piece of research<sup>5</sup> eventually became occasions for public debate about the region's environmental clean-up, engaging people who were previously less involved in such issues. A few ex-workers also took part, and their presence was considered by environmental activists to be essential.

The retrieval of a community's narrative, by acknowledging the conflicts experienced in the past and not hiding a 'divided' memory that is still alive (*apud* Foot, 2009), has generated democratic discussions on the possibility of a social and economic recovery that is compatible with the region's environment and its people's wishes. The participatory project as a whole also produced important epidemiological results for bettering health conditions and the serious pollution levels in Manfredonia (*apud* Gianicolo, Vigotti *et al.*, 2016). The work on collective memory and the *continuous catastrophe*, in turn, revealed how the damage suffered has remained unrecognized until now. It has opened - as has also happened in other communities (*apud* Centemeri, 2011a) - a democratic request for changes in management policies that concern the community's future. Finally, through public debate and the local committee's resistance, unsolved pollution-related issues were voiced by the local press and eventually reached the regional government, thus initiating a political democratic process that is paramount to discuss environmental decontamination in Manfredonia and take action.

## Ecological and democratic crisis in Manfredonia

### Manfredonia: an Italian case of environmental injustice

The participatory historical study herein described has revealed the unknown history of Manfredonia's environmental catastrophe and the important experience of the local environmental movement. In order to analyse the relationship between ecological and democratic crises in this case, we choose to refer to some of the concepts elaborated by Environmental Justice theory - notably, its social definition of environment, the issue of the lack of recognition of local identities, the matter of participatory injustice, and the relevance of narrative injustice.

Environmental Justice (EJ) has highlighted how, overall and over time, economic growth has determined an unequal distribution of both environmental goods - in other words, access to natural resources - and damage. In fact, social and environmental costs have repeatedly been charged to marginalized people. Unequal exposure to pollution is due to unequal power, class, ethnicity, and gender relations (*apud* Martinez-Alier, 2009; Martinez-Alier *et al.*, 2016; Temper *et al.*, 2018; Purdy, 2018).

Beginning in the U.S. during the 1980s (*apud* Martinez Alier 2002; Armiero 2013; Purdy 2018), the discussion on Environmental Justice has recently reached European countries, where it is perceived and analysed in terms of social categories rather than in racial and ethnic terms (*apud* Pasetto *et al.*, 2019). In any case, in both its global, regional, and national dimensions, the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) has evidenced how communities affected by industrial pollution are, not coincidentally, also the weakest ones in terms of economic, social, and cultural resources (*apud* Martinez-Alier, 2009; Scholsberg, 2013).

5 Malavasi, Giulia (2018), Manfredonia. Storia di una catastrofe continuata, Milano: Jaca Book.

The Environmental Justice Movement has broadened the concept of the *environment*, generally defined as the space of everyday life “where we live, work and play” (Scholsberg, 2013). Its social definition includes institutions, built settings, and the social allocation of resources (*apud* Purdy, 2018). It refers to a space that includes both human and non-human nature and where the barriers between individuals and communities are removed (*apud* Scholsberg, 2013).

Moreover, we can consider the notion of environment as embodying a space for human relationships, as a space where a community’s memories are collected (*apud* Allegretti *et al.*, 2013). Studies on environmental and social movements have also introduced the concept of *place*, defined as “the ensemble of relations and practices between the natural and the social worlds, at the levels of body, home, habitat and community” (Escobar *et al.*, 2002). The *place* is where environment, ethnicity, and culture converge.

This social notion of environment implies that one of the reasons for the unequal distribution of environmental risks and goods is the establishment’s lack of recognition of both individuals and communities in their cultural and social identity. External actors, such as companies or the national government, often impose a use for a specific territory and its natural resources that is radically different from the traditional habits of the local community, in turn deprived of the possibility of playing a role in the decision making processes. As Martinez-Alier wrote,

social mobilizations over resource extraction, environmental degradation, or waste disposal are not only about the distribution of environmental benefits and costs (expressed in monetary or non-monetary valuation languages); they are also about participation in decision making and recognition of group identities. (Martinez-Alier 2018)

The lack of recognition of local cultural identities caused by environmental injustice in Western industrialised countries is analogous to that of the non-Western world, in which communities’ identities are particularly close-knit to collective rights and to the notion of *territory* - understood as “a collective of spaces, human groups (including both the living and their ancestors) rivers, forests, animals, and plants” (Santos *et al.*, 2007: xx). Among non-Western populations, the exploitation of natural resources by outside forces tends to make their worldviews on their relationship to territory and land quite explicit. After all, the defence of local identity is the manner through which they demand that their collective rights and control over their land and natural resources be acknowledged. This follows an alternative perspective to the western capitalistic view of the relationship between humans and the environment (based on the idea of industrial growth and the right to property). Therefore, environmental impact over these groups assumes not only a socio-economic dimension, but also an epistemic one, given its denial of local viewpoints, values, and practices, especially with regards to the relationship between a given community and its home (*apud* Santos *et al.*, 2007).

Societies suffering from environmental injustice in Western countries can also be considered through this perspective. A large industry’s arrival or dangerous waste dumping in a certain region are perceived by the local population not only as something that dismantles the local traditional economic sectors but their relationship with their own territory as well. The erasure of local identity is sometimes seen as a process similar to that of colonization, a mechanism of exploitation of natural resources imposed by external actors like industrial companies and national governments.

Local identities’ lack of validation leads us to the subject of political participation, part of the broad concept of justice assumed by the EJ. With the inclusion of racial and social factors into the ‘environmental injustice’ category, EJ proposes a pluralistic notion of justice (*apud* Scholsberg, 2013) that considers, on the one hand, the unfairness in the unequal distribution of

environmental damages and benefits among individuals or population groups belonging to different ethnicities and/or socioeconomic status; on the other, the mechanisms and processes through which this “distributive justice” (Purdy, 2018) is created and sustained, including the involved communities’ recognition and participation (*apud* Scholsberg, 2004).

Communities suffering from environmental injustice have often been deprived of democratic participation. Their role in making crucial decisions about the location of industrial plants, on how to manage industrial productions, and more generally about the whole development of their land is systematically denied by large companies and national governments. This increases the impact on the people in question, already affected by both environmental contamination and the degradation of their territory’s socio-cultural dimensions (*apud* Pasetto *et al.*, 2019).

These dynamics have produced “ecological distribution conflicts” in the past and continue to do so in the present; they result in various social conflicts generated by environmental injustice (*apud* Martinez-Alier, 2018). In the face of this scenario, communities often reclaim their close relationship to their lived-in environment and want to be protagonists in potential political actions towards finding a remedy for the suffered damage (*apud* Centemeri, 2011a; Centemeri 2011b). Moreover, they often fight to be engaged in the politics of valorisation of the community’s environmental and cultural heritage. In this perspective, the lived-in environment takes on a historical, cultural, and social connotation. “Participatory justice” arises as another crucial topic in the struggle for environmental justice (*apud* Scholsberg, 2013).

Studies on the processes determining environmental injustice scenarios underline a few recurrent aspects. Firstly, in the contaminated areas, the inhabitants were not properly recognized as stakeholders with the right to participate in the decision-making processes concerning the use of the land and its development. On the contrary; communities are generally poorly informed about the potential impacts of the pollutant productions. Furthermore, environmental injustice (related to decision-making processes) often leads to the choice of locating environmentally burdensome industries in disadvantaged areas (*apud* Pasetto *et al.*, 2019). The relationship between communities that have suffered environmental injustice and the democratic matter of participatory justice is quite clear: “groups of people have been historically excluded or marginalized by the institutions—at all scales, from the local to the global—which are responsible for developing policies and taking decisions changing environmental conditions of the areas where they live” (Pasetto *et al.*, 2019: 998).

This exclusion of local communities from the decisional processes holds consequences for peoples’ health as well. As the eminent epidemiologist Michael Marmot has examined in his research about health inequalities’ social determinants, community empowerment is always necessary to improve a people’s physical and mental health. The population needs to have control over the fundamental choices on their material well-being conditions, about their life and about the decisional processes regarding to the social and political dimension of their community (*apud* Marmot, 2016).

Besides the enrichment of the notions of justice and environment and its emphasis on democratic participation, Environmental Justice also challenges the elitist framework of scientific expertise in favour of popular participation and grassroots movements (*apud* Purdy, 2018), notably in the field of popular epidemiology (*apud* Martinez-Alier, 2018; Brown, 1992). This approach is linked to the PNS’s (Post Normal Science) redefinition of expertise, broadened to include the experience of an “extended peer community” (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993) - a principle at the basis of the “Ambiente Salute Manfredonia” project (*apud* De Marchi, 2018). Through this frame, the history of Manfredonia is seen as an Italian case of environmental injustice, which makes it possible to underline some key aspects of the local connections between environmental crisis and democracy.



One of the features revealed by this community's history is the social dimension of environmental matters determined by petrochemical production - above all, the occupational or employment blackmail suffered in a disadvantaged area. The Italian government planned the development of an area enduring extreme poverty and emigration through the installation of a heavily pollutant plant. The factory based its economic competition on the deep consumption of natural resources and on the process of externalizing such environmental costs to the community, instead of claiming responsibility for them. In Manfredonia as well as in other Italian areas, the "economic miracle" (*apud* Crainz, 1996) largely based its own growth on the exploitation of an extensive low-cost labour pool (*apud* Castronovo, 1975) and on public funding to guarantee big companies'<sup>6</sup> investment in Southern Italy. The petrochemical plant - the fourth largest in Italy - was included in the "industrial development poles plan" (*apud* Cerrito, 2010; De Benedetti, 2013; Ginsborg, 1989), but, as in many other similar Italian cases, it did not generate autonomous economic growth in the area. It was a so-called "cathedral in the desert", not allowing for any kind of local sustainable development but only exploiting the land and its inhabitants. It was abandoned when it no longer produced economic profit.

Clearly, we can define Manfredonia's industrialization as an Italian case of the "path of least resistance": a pollutant plant located near a community with small political power, weak social and economic conditions, thus potentially less resistant to the project's implementation (*apud* Armiero, 2013; Schelly and Stretesky, 2009). As in other industrialization cases, the local economy's transformation from agricultural (with an important fishing sector) to heavily industrial had serious impacts on the natural environment and altered citizens' perspective of their surroundings. The natural world, which at first offered livelihood and as such needed to be preserved, became detached from economic security. After all, financial stability was now linked to a safe and well remunerated job in the factory.

Collecting the memories of the plant's workers made it possible to understand their point of view. Many of them had left Manfredonia some years before the factory's inauguration to find a job in Northern Italy or abroad. With the opening of the *Enichem* plant, they were able to come back to Manfredonia - be it from Germany, or from "that hellhole that was Mirafiori's production line" (as declared by an ex-worker during the interview).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, both national and local politicians as well as ENI managers presented industrialization as the only policy with potential to solve the age-old poverty issues of Southern Italian regions. In fact, in a famous speech, the then ENI manager Enrico Mattei talked about "the hopes of petrochemical industry", emphasizing how it could guarantee full employment for the poorest regions (Mattei, 1960).

It cannot be denied that, thanks to the plant, Manfredonia did achieve its economic miracle. This is exemplified by the rise of a local working class, which was proud to have reached such a standard of living, previously unavailable to them - the achievement of a new status, «pride of workers-clothes drying in the sun» (Di Luzio, 2016). This sense of fulfillment, however, was based on a toxic trade, that is, work in exchange for (a silent and invisible) illness. As Stefania Barca has highlighted, the petrochemical plant "sublimated corporate and State promises of universal wellbeing and liberation from illness, hunger, scarcity and toil, while the pervasiveness and persistence of their disruptive effects over living systems was long hidden or denied in public discourse" (Barca, 2014b: 537). Only in the following years would the cost

<sup>6</sup> Public funding guaranteed for the big companies', both private and public, like *Enichem*.

<sup>7</sup> Mirafiori was the main FIAT plant in Turin.

the community had had to pay be revealed. The workers were the first ones to physically suffer from the chemical pollution.

Since the start of production, the combination of occupational blackmail, daily pollution, and externalisation of industrial costs (charged to the surrounding natural and human environment) has determined a process of “slow violence” for the community (*apud* Nixon, 2011). This violence was responsible for the catastrophe, together with the harsh violence of the arsenic release in 1976 or the other accidents. The role of occupational blackmail in Manfredonia, in turn, was paramount in the creation of environmental injustice, given that the labour/environment conflict arose as a “cultural and political construct” (*apud* Barca, 2014a: 3). In other words, even if the plant workers physically suffered from the effects of such polluting production, they did not seem “to have the right to be environmentalists” (Barca, 2014a: 21). In fact, when the environmental struggle against the plant began, the blackmail caused recurring conflicts among activists and workers - friction deliberately imposed to protect the company’s interests. As an example, in 1989, when the judicial authority prohibited the release of petrochemical wastewater into the sea thanks to environmental action, the industry - which had never planned a sustainable treatment of such waste products - interrupted caprolactam production and threatened to fire more than 500 workers.

The political and social effects of this blackmail via employment were thus very deep. Blackmail denied employers the right to work without having to die; it denied many citizens - especially the plant’s workers - the right to fight for a clean environment to live in; finally, it caused divisive disputes within the community, and reduced the political agenda of workers’ organizations, unions and local communist party (even if not without internal disagreements), for the single purpose of safeguarding existing jobs.

The blackmail also had a pervasive cultural impact which has remained to this day, by producing a double narrative about the relationship between the plant and the community. After all, from their perspective, many ex-workers consider great economic development to be the crucial result of industrialization, not dramatic pollution as argued by environmentalists. This partisan perspective was also based on the recruitment policies adopted when the petrochemical plant started its production. Local institutions and the region’s Catholic Party (Democrazia Cristiana) - strengthened by its close link with the national deputies in the Italian Government - managed the plant’s employment policy by means of political cronyism: a chapel in the centre of the city, for example, was considered by citizens to be a job centre. This kind of dynamic determined latent antagonism within the population and to this day is considered by some citizens as the primary cause for the conflict that would explode between workers and environmentalists. Inevitably, the ex-workers’ point of view was linked to job opportunities, to the great changes the industry had brought to their way of life, and thus to a disavowal of the plant’s deep pollutant impact.

The workers’ perspective should, however, be contextualized. In Manfredonia, industrial workers did not experience the period of struggle that had occurred during the Seventies in other Italian industries (mostly in Northern regions), where a widespread workers’ movement, in defense of health and the environment, had been developed inside the factories and eventually started to involve communities at large. In Manfredonia, the workers were not aware of the petrochemical production’s considerable risks; they received no information on the production’s hazards, and there were no controls whatsoever regarding safety or the correct use of personal protective equipment. In the weeks after the arsenic accident, in fact, hundreds of workers were employed to clean the arsenic dust without any kind of protection, as stated by the public prosecutor during the trial that followed (thanks to the inquiry of Nicola

Lovecchio<sup>8</sup>). Consequently, whereas in other chemical plants like the *Enichem* in Ravenna, a strike in 1968 had wholly stopped production in the fight against worsening environmental conditions, the Manfredonian scene saw only a couple of sporadic strikes regarding safety matters without amounting significant participation. Unlike other factories – such as the one in Castellanza (near Milan), where the workers’ struggles led to a renewal of production processes – *Enichem*’s managers kept workers obsolete, unaware and unsafe. It was an administrative style that would cause severe accidents, such as the fire in the caprolactam warehouse.

Notwithstanding the low level of awareness among these workers with regards to the environment and safety inside the plant, a few years after the end of the popular environmental struggles a remarkable experience of “working-class environmentalism” (*apud* Barca, 2012) occurred in Manfredonia. Nicola Lovecchio (head of the filling-unit for fertilizer production), with the support of his oncologist doctor, Maurizio Portaluri, led a tenacious enquiry to find out more about the chemical products the workers had to deal with and their association to the workers’ health conditions. Thanks to his enquiry, the public prosecutor ordered further inspections and put the plant’s managers on trial. For the first time, the situation of workers dying due to chemical contamination - “*Enichem*’s ghosts” (*apud* Di Luzio, 2003) - became visible. The acquittal, however, did not acknowledge the damage on their health; it was, as said by Lovecchio’s wife, a case of “suspended justice”. Nonetheless, the trial was determinant for many ex-workers to become aware of the injustice they had suffered, strongly reaffirm the need for health protection in the work-place, and outspokenly defend the right of every worker and citizen to full dignity.

In other instances, Manfredonia’s story reveals the underlying connection between the local and global dimensions of environmental issues. An example of this was the struggle against the *Ship of poisons* Deep Sea Carrier. The ship’s toxic charge, destined for *Enichem* to be dismantled, was originally destined for Nigeria, the same as other ships transporting toxic waste produced by several European chemical companies. When Nigeria and other African countries rejected it, however, the ship and its contents made the headlines in many Italian newspapers. Journalists said that public opinion should be aware of the serious damage European companies were causing to the African people. The Deep Sea Carrier case revealed the global dimension of weaker communities’ deliberate economic exploitation; it was a concrete example of what Ron Nixon would later on write about the World Bank’s plan to export rich nations’ garbage and toxic waste to Africa (*apud* Nixon, 2011).

The parallel with the exploitation of Italy’s social and economic inequalities for the benefit of toxic pollution distribution is clear. The industrialisation process pursued in Manfredonia, in fact, was not an isolated case in the country. In the Seventies, many industrial districts were established in the Southern portion of the country, resulting in similarly devastating politics and depicting a sort of self-colonization process within Italy itself (*apud* Poggio and Ruzzenenti, 2012). This analysis was confirmed by Manfredonia’s citizens, who often said in the interviews carried out during the study: “we have been colonized, we have had to *swallow this damage*”.

After the plant’s closure, the *continuous catastrophe* and its violence did not stop. Without a real clean-up of the area where the petrochemical plant had been active, the community suffered, as it suffers to this day, the violence of such devastating production. Workers and locals must deal with the pollutants’ effects on their bodies - as proved by an increasing number of deaths (*apud* Gianicolo, Vigotti *et al.*, 2016) - besides having their natural environment

ruined. In 2016, data from the Ministry of the Environment stated that 18% of the land was cleaned up as regards the soil, and 0% as regards groundwater.<sup>9</sup> Such lack of environmental remediation has determined the reality of an entire community, “frozen” in a polluted area and missing opportunities for environmental and social regeneration.

### The continuous catastrophe: democratic crisis and democratic participation

Communities struggling against industrial pollution often experience widespread mistrust in democratic institutions. Called by these communities to provide solutions to the environmental crisis, representative institutions repeatedly fail in adequately protecting people’s health and the environment, in building new paradigms of growth compatible with healthy living, and in opening up spaces for political participation. In Manfredonia, the connection between the ecological crisis and democracy is complex. On the one hand, mistrust in democratic institutions was very deep in the past, and it still is; on the other, during the years of struggle against the petrochemical plant, part of the community experienced a real, renewed form of democratic citizenship.

Regarding the former, we can assert that, besides the path of least resistance, the community suffered many episodes of *institutional deceit* – the exact words employed by citizens during interviews. Presently, we can only provide some examples to clarify this statement. The first instance of institutional deceit was that of the decision over the plant’s location. The land of Manfredonia was originally part of an area destined for touristic development (Comprensorio turistico del Gargano) by the National Government in 1966. Several legal limitations had thus been enforced in order to protect that ecosystem and its historical and cultural assets. However, after the discovery of methane in the subsoil, just one year after the government’s ruling (1967), the planning for the area was completely remade. It became destined to be an industrial district, hindering any kind of environmentally friendly-type development. Moreover, the plant was installed in the outskirts of Manfredonia (less than two kilometres from the city centre) but formally within the administrative border of another small town 18 kilometres away, Monte Sant’Angelo. The new plan for Manfredonia had serious consequences, since the Italian law on industrial production (*Testo Unico sulle Leggi Sanitarie*) ruled that the power to intervene in the protection of public health was a prerogative of the Mayor of the city where the industry was located. Manfredonia’s local government consequently held no power over the factory, while Monte Sant’Angelo showed no real interest in intervening. This had long-lasting effects: even in the days following the arsenic accident in 1976, Manfredonia’s Mayor Michele Magno would struggle to enter the plant in order to assess the damage caused by the explosion.

If we consider the regional powers involved in this specific case – that is, the regional government of Apulia and some of the regional agencies responsible for environmental and public health protection – their management was marked by the total absence of control over the situation. They did not act adequately to verify the industrial activity and to ensure environmental safety. As the Ministerial commission assessed in 1989,<sup>10</sup> they did not inspect the industrial emissions present in the air or in the sea. They also complied with some of

<sup>9</sup> Ministero dell’Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio del Mare-Direzione generale per la Salvaguardia del Territorio e delle Acque, S.I.N. Siti di Interesse Nazionale. Stato delle procedure per la bonifica, giugno 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Ministero dell’Ambiente – Servizio prevenzione degli inquinamenti e risanamento ambientale, Relazione della Commissione tecnica per la verifica del rischio, della sicurezza e della compatibilità ambientale e sanitaria dello stabilimento Enichem di Manfredonia con le città di Manfredonia e di Monte S. Angelo e con il comprensorio territoriale interessato, Roma, 24 luglio 1989.

*Enichem's* requests, as in the case of the authorization granted for the industrial incinerator. Furthermore, during that same period, a huge argument between the judicial authority (Pretura di Otranto) and the National Government arose over the Ministerial permission to release industrial waste into the sea. The National Government eventually granted *Enichem* the rights to discard, causing a serious threat to the environment and marine fauna.

Moreover, during the trial started in 1997, thanks to the enquiry of Nicola Lovecchio, the institutions which had not acted to ensure public health betrayed citizens and workers yet again. People felt hurt by the trial's outcome, which did not hold the managers responsible for the damage suffered by the *Enichem* workers. At the same time, local institutions withdrew from the trial in exchange for the compensations the industry offered. Many locals felt deceived by their representatives and most developed a resigned view of democratic participation.

Besides *institutional deceit*, information also played a crucial role in terms of dynamics between ecological matters and democratic participation in Manfredonia. One of the dramatic aspects of the big arsenic release incident was how the plant's director had actually denied the contamination, initially only informing citizens about water vapor releases. It was only the factory committee's complaint to the Mayor that would later disclose the pollution's real dramatic extent. In summary, the lack of information offered to the community had been intentionally pursued by *Enichem's* management since the start of production in the early 1970s.

It is essential to note that, during that same period, the people of Manfredonia had risen up against a naphtha-powered electrical plant project, planned by the ENEL (Electricity State Company). Contrarily, very few voices opposed the petrochemical firm's installation, despite the fact that the City Council expressly and openly criticized its location near the city. The main reasons for these contrasting approaches were, firstly, the higher rate of job opportunities offered by the petrochemical plant (a strategy which we have defined, in this paper, as occupational blackmail), and secondly, that whereas news of the electrical plant's environmental impact was widespread, there was no awareness among citizens of the serious risk posed by petrochemical production. In fact, in their accounts of this portion of history, citizens described the *Enichem* plant as *a forbidden city*, a place on which they had no information about.

As previously stated, the silence around the petrochemical plant's effects on public health affected the general population as well as plant workers. They physically suffered from the contamination of chemical pollutants, and in many cases – as with Nicola Lovecchio – the plant's management and medical personnel said nothing about the inflicted harm (*apud* Di Luzio, 2003; Barca, 2011a; Barca, 2012). The lack of information suffered by Manfredonia's population was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights as a result of the judicial action started by the Citizen Women's Movement's complaint.<sup>11</sup> Not by chance, the spread of information about petrochemical production would be one of the environmental struggle's main tasks.

This consideration leads to the second part of the present analysis, which focuses on the connection between the ecological crisis and democratic participation in Manfredonia. In addition to the crisis of representative institutions, this community also experienced an important period of democratic participation when the great popular movement *Movimento Cittadino di Manfredonia* rose up in defense of the local environment and people's health. As

<sup>11</sup> In 1998, the Italian State was condemned for the violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, concerning the right to respect private and family life. European Court of Human Rights, Case of Guerra and Others v. Italy (116/1996/735/932), Judgment, Strasbourg 19.02.1998.

mentioned earlier, the triggering event was the *Ship of poisons* coming to *Enichem*. In September 1988, Manfredonia's population reacted against the Italian Government's decision regarding the ship, protesting the serious threat it posed for the community (naturally already affected by several petrochemical-related accidents). For four days, the whole city – women and men, fishermen, teachers, doctors, the entire middle-class population, as well as plant workers – protested in the streets, broke into the City Hall, and paralyzed the city.

After those early insurrectional days, the struggle became more political. For the following two years, citizens met in Manfredonia's main square every evening - the tents in Giovanni XXIII Square are considered a local symbol of democratic participation even today. The petrochemical production processes were examined in detail to understand how hazardous they were for people's health and the environment. The movement then produced leaflets, press releases, posters, and dossiers to spread information among citizens. These activities determined an alteration in the movement's style of operation. It had begun by opposing the *Ship of poisons* and would subsequently start paying attention to the petrochemical plant's hazards. In the initial period, plant workers and their unions took part in the popular movement. When it started demanding the plant's closure, however, occupational blackmail spoke louder, a dissention that led to deep conflict between the workers and environmental activists.

During the two years of struggle, the movement organized many events in the city's streets. Besides occupying the City Hall Council to obtain the Mayor's support, it assembled some big demonstrations; one of the largest ones involved more than 40.000 citizens walking to the factory gates (a remarkable turnout, seen as Manfredonia had only about 60.000 inhabitants at the time). People's participation, the creation of shared knowledge, and the citizens' pressure on local institutions to have a voice in planning their territory's future were the basis for the population's reclaim of their democratic rights. The environmental movement asserted the community's prerogative to re-establish the relationship with its land in renewed terms, seen as the petrochemical plant had changed that interaction completely, by imposing a territory and natural resource use that was radically different from the community's traditional habits, also depriving them from the possibility to participate in decision-making processes.

The term employed by citizens to describe this reconstructed place of participation was *agora*. During the interviews, they highlighted the transversal participation of different social groups in their daily activities and in the large rallies - fishermen, artisans, teachers, local traders, environmentalist associations like Legambiente and WWF, professional associations and different social organizations (such as Acli, linked to the Catholic church, or Anffas, which worked with disabled people). Civil society had played an important role in Italian society, and it does so until this day (*apud* Ginsborg, 2007). Local parties were also involved in the Citizens' committee, not without internal contradictions.

The women's movement played a crucial role in the struggle. Connecting women with different social and cultural backgrounds, the Citizen Women's Movement was a real innovative social actor, able to draw attention to the great risk of living near the plant. Given their tireless activity, they were named *Vestali della Terra* (Earth's Vestals). These women demanded the acknowledgement of the community's identity and history, struggling against a kind of production that had destroyed local cultivations (hundreds of secular olive trees had been cut to build the plant, for example) and polluted the soil, the air and the sea. One of them wrote a little tale at the time that would become very popular among the activists: in it, the *Enichem* plant was described as a giant squid looming over the city against which the founder of the city, King Manfredi (the symbol of the population mobilized in the struggle), had drawn his sword.

Studies focusing on the role of women in environmental movements have underlined the peculiar approach they assume in terms of the link between the natural and the social dimension

of existence. Their “politics of place” very often consider the physical place as a “continuum between body, home, community and land” (Escobar *et al.* 2002). In this pluralistic view of political action, the environment is understood as the result of natural, economic, political, and social relations, all of them intrinsically connected to the issues of justice and quality of life. Therefore, women’s environmental movements have often considered economic profit and productivity as secondary to daily life, peace, and ecological sustainability (*apud* Harcourt and Escobar, 2002). In their “political action of place”, women, “as members of the so-called “third actor” in the modern *polis* – civil society – have criticized the traditional economic development model on the grounds that it ignores the environment and people’s needs” (Harcourt and Escobar, 2002: 10).

In the case of Manfredonia, this mass female involvement in the environmental struggle was surprising. Quite unexpectedly for the Southern Italian society of the 1980s, women achieved a double liberation. The first was the conquered freedom of the women themselves, who changed their traditional role in their respective families by leaving their houses and meeting every evening in the main square to study petrochemical production and disseminate information among citizens. In their narrated memories, this social activism was not without conflict within their families, but was nevertheless remembered as a period of great liberation (what they had made happen was, in their own words, a *University in the square*). Many of the interviewed women, for example, remember Graziella, a tireless activist and fighter; once, in a public meeting with a national deputy talking about the industrial plant, she had walked right in the centre of the debate and shouted: “Be very careful what you say: we attended our University in the square!”.

At the same time, women promoted their territory’s liberation from a productivity-based development program exploiting people and the environment. The women of Manfredonia condemned the national silence surrounding the terrifying living conditions of the locals and, as a result, had to deal with the national media describing their protests as “mass hysteria” (cf. *infra*). From a holistic point of view, they brought to light the petrochemical plant’s incompatibility in economic, environmental, and psychological terms with the web of relations that made up that community. The Citizen Women’s Movement proposed a gender analysis of economic growth that highlighted the relationship between social groups and the natural world through the key of power and domination (*apud* Armiero and Barca, 2004). They overthrew this framework by focusing on the idea of *care*, extended from the family to the whole community, as well as on the notion of *liveable development* (*sviluppo vivibile*) founded on the defense of life above any economic interests.

Furthermore, Manfredonian women pointed out how what they were proposing was radically different from the idea of sustainable development - a notion that implies some kind of compromise with economic requirements. In their eyes, life, not economic profits, should be the *root* of development. Within their reasoned view, we can find the idea of “social reproduction”, a concept of procreation that is extended beyond the individual to brace the whole community and the natural world (*apud* Schlosberg, 2013). Their struggle against the plant experienced some important moments, such as a great demonstration with thousands of women in 1988. During their strong-willed fight, they gave speeches in the Italian Parliament and in the European Parliament in Strasbourg and won the judicial action taken to the European Court of Human Rights<sup>12</sup>. The revolutionary role of these women, reinforced by the will to tell

12 European Court of Human Rights, Case of Guerra and Others v. Italy (116/1996/735/932), Judgment, Strasbourg 19.02.1998.

their own story, guaranteed a context in which a participatory research like the one undertaken by “Ambiente Salute Manfredonia” was possible.

### Manfredonia and narrative injustice

According to recent studies, the history of industrial development in the West has been led by a progressive mainstream narrative about the relationship between energy patterns and Modern Economic Growth - which emphasizes the increase in energy consumption, mineral technology and private property, but either silences environmental and social costs and global environmental inequalities (*apud* Barca, 2011b) or reduces them to inevitable costs for the whole of society. In the early 2000s, a new narrative of the history of human development introduced the notion of Anthropocene to describe the new geological epoch of the Earth’s history that we now live in. The Anthropocene is the ‘Age of Man’: the human species, *anthropos*, represents a force so powerful that it determined the end of the Holocene, a 12.000-year period of relative climatic stability on Earth. We are a force so mighty as to change the natural equilibrium of the ecosystem, as happened with worldwide economic growth in the last seventy years (the Great Acceleration of the fossil fuels global system) (*apud* Crutzen, Stoermer, 2000).

Nevertheless, some analysts argue that this narrative does not allow for the contextualization and historicization of *whom* the *anthropos* really represents; it does not pay attention to

the different subjectivities produced through social and environmental histories, that is, distinguishing between the human groups that have benefited from exploiting earth’s resources and other human beings for profit, and the human groups that have borne the brunt of ecological and social despoliation. (Di Chiro, 2018: 528)

This narrative, thus, renders “invisible the underlying systems driving earthly destruction and exploitation that certain humans created, and that other humans powerfully resisted” (Di Chiro, 2018: 528). Similarly, Environmental Justice argues that the mainstream historical narrative on modern technological development systematically ignores the ethnic, class, and gender oppression determined by that economic model. EJ has emphasized this mindset especially in reference to the exploitation of the human labour of African peoples through slavery and the dispossession of indigenous peoples through colonialism; however, he has also evinced comparable dynamics with regards to marginalized communities that have to suffer the negative externalities of the industrial fossil-fuel-based economy (*apud* Di Chiro, 2018).

Concurrently, EJ-type analyses have enlarged the notion of space to the sphere of narrative: stories produced by polluted communities are “‘spaces’ in which environmental justice struggles play out and become public knowledge [...]. The imaginative spaces of environmental justice are where the historically and spatially uneven politics of pollution intersect with personal and geographical imaginations” (Houston, 2013: 420). For these communities, the possibility of telling their own history is also crucial to highlight matters generally not considered by the official narrative. Environmental degradation, contamination, and toxicity often are associated with invisibility and marginalization. These groups suffer not only from environmental impacts and harmful consequences on their health, but are also often rendered invisible in public imagination, being defined as “shadow places” (*apud* Houston, 2013). The effects of this invisibility also impact these communities’ future:

the associations of environmentally degraded places with shadows, invisibility and an absence of public responsibility create conditions for further environmental injury. [...] Their status as already degraded [zones] makes them desirable sites for continued hazardous land use. (Houston, 2013: 420)



As a result, storytelling can offer an alternative narrative of the history of a polluted community, producing practices of resistance and redevelopment of the local territory. Some studies in Environmental History have offered an alternative narrative to the dominant one on industrial development. This alternative history underlines the connections between models of production, human beings - both in their social dimension and as physical, living bodies - and the biosphere, telling “a counterstory of the age of fossil fuels, which incorporates the point of view of places, bodies, labour and environmental justice” (Barca, 2011b: 1313). Through this perspective, the real costs to humans, nature, culture, and places are included within the narrative of European industrial development. Likewise, the permanence of environmental damage - like the kind produced by petrochemical production - becomes a critical issue in the historical enquiry regarding industrial development, which consequently has to begin taking into account the “environmental violence” (*apud* Barca, 2014b) perpetrated by this kind of production.

The inclusion of environmental violence within the analysis of industrial development can alter its perception and thus reveal its connection to a “narrative violence” (*apud* Barca, 2014b). This other form of violence suffered by polluted communities refers to the politics of silencing information about the effects of production on health and the environment and to removing communities’ histories of environmental violence. The communities affected by environmental injustice very often also suffer from “narrative injustice” (*apud* Barca, 2014b). As we have said, the experience of citizens is not taken into consideration by the mainstream narrative or version. Their story is denied, or narrated by others, without giving the citizens a voice or considering their point of view. In many other cases, their complaints about the unsustainability of this toxic development is reduced to the economic growth’s collateral damage.

On the contrary, a counter narrative can develop from the perspective of the people and communities suffering environmental exploitation - in other words, by adopting practices of storytelling among them. As analyzed in other contexts of environmental crisis, storytelling practices can be “resilient, resistant, reciprocal, regenerative” for a group (*apud* Di Chiro, 2018). Therefore, alongside the issues suggested by environmental justice, the history of industrialization in Manfredonia should also refer to the concept of narrative justice, which underlines the necessity to voice local memories in order to produce a collective narrative (*apud* Centemeri, 2011a).

In the case of Manfredonia, there was not only a complete lack of information and a silencing of the disruptive effects caused by the petrochemical production, but also an actually falsified narrative that was perpetrated by the media. The mainstream narrative of industrial growth was largely accepted, and the local voices that were arising at the time against petrochemical plant were harshly criticized. An article written by one of the time’s most important Italian reporters, Giorgio Bocca, arouses indignation among citizens even today. In his article about the citizens’ struggle against the *Ship of poisons* and the plant, Bocca defined the environmental movement as a case of mass hysteria, seen as there was no evidence, he argued, on the risks involved in petrochemical production. Furthermore, this Southern city had simply been unable to overcome its cultural backwardness towards industrial progress, and the citizens’ movement, in which a large number of women took part, was repeatedly described as irrational and unreasonable (*apud* Bocca, 1988). The article, published in one of the most important Italian newspapers, *La Repubblica*, distorted the movement’s perspective, while framing the public energy company ENI in a wholly positive light (*apud* Bocca, 1988). Not by

chance, Manfredonian women reacted to this by organizing a huge demonstration, in which they wore white tissues over their mouths as a symbol of their “denied word”.<sup>13</sup>

During the following years, Manfredonia also suffered from another type of narrative injustice that can be defined as a *historical removal*. Its history, so heavily affected by the effects of the *continuous catastrophe* and the arsenic accident, is not well-known in Italy like other similar disasters (e.g. Seveso). The *European directive on the major-accident hazards of certain industrial activities* is widely known as the “Seveso directive”, without any mention to Manfredonia, even if it was enacted six years after the Seveso and the Manfredonia accidents, that had occurred in 1976, three months apart from each other.

This represents a national *historical removal*, which involves both institutions and the media. There were three fundamental reasons for this: firstly, the difference between a factory located in a Northern region, near Milan, as was the *Icmesa* plant in Seveso, and the one located in a Southern, peripheric area. Secondly, *Icmesa* was a multinational company, while in Manfredonia, *Enichem* was a public company, owned by ENI, in turn linked to the national government and the Ministry of *Partecipazioni Statali*. The third reason for the difference in coverage was the incidents’ immediate effects on public health: the dioxin explosion in Seveso produced the rapid and dramatic result of chloracne, while the arsenic explosion in Manfredonia did not cause such a visible or immediate massive consequence on public well-being. As such, the news of all other accidents in Manfredonia never reached a wide public.

Besides the national *removal*, Manfredonia’s catastrophe also generated one within the local community, in the form of many people refraining from speaking about *Enichem*. One reason for this is the aforementioned friction present among the citizens, which had arisen in the past in relation to occupational blackmail. Secondly, the *removal* is due to the intolerable amount of suffering and health problems that citizens often suspect could be related to the petrochemical production. Telling its own story and organizing events to discuss these past and present events, however, could be a way for the community to voice their different opinions, regain democratic spaces, re-appropriate the environment as a place for collecting local memories (*apud* Centemeri, 2011a), and bridge the gap in the national mainstream narrative.

## Conclusion

As Donna Houston has argued, “Environmental Justice storytelling is a practice that can give insight into what it means to live with and transform environmental crisis” (Houston, 2013, 433). A similar practice of storytelling was conducted with citizens within the participatory research project “Ambiente Salute Manfredonia”. This study made it possible to value local knowledge and highlight what it meant for Manfredonian people to live near a petrochemical plant as well as to suffer what they called a *continuous catastrophe*. The citizens engaged in this participatory research found their own words to describe their history and subsequently shared them with the whole community, overcoming the historical removal of the catastrophe Manfredonia has suffered in terms of environment and community health.

In this story of environmental injustice, the social impact of this kind of economic colonization has been revealed - notably the path of least resistance that determined the localization of such a pollutant production and the occupational blackmail imposed to the community, which generated a deep conflict between workers and environmentalists. Telling this story after more than twenty years and enhancing the democratic experience of both the

<sup>13</sup> Interviewees own description.

environmental movement and Nicola Lovecchio's working-class environmentalism made it possible to open new spaces of dialogue among the citizens.

In Manfredonia's history, the close link between ecological crisis and democratic crisis has been revealed as a complex set of dynamics. On one hand, the environmental degradation determined mistrust in democratic institutions, and the local environmental injustice appeared to be closely linked to the issue of participatory injustice, which prevented the community from playing a determinant role in the decisional processes about the use of its land and resources. On the other hand, during the years of the struggle against the petrochemical plant, the local environmental movement experienced a real, renewed form of democratic participation, in which women played a crucial role.

Telling the story of Manfredonia also made it possible to highlight local requests for environmental redevelopment. Through public debate and the local committee's resistance, its unsolved pollution-related issues appeared in the local press and reached the regional government, initiating a political and democratic process. In April 2019, the general managers of the regional agencies for Environment and Health came to the city to meet its citizens and discuss how to start a democratic process for the environmental clean-up. This process is not without its difficulties and setbacks, and the local committee constantly remains vigilant, trying to maintain pressure on the different institutions involved. In the meantime, the committee also seeks to build connections with other local environmental movements (in particular, the ones active in Taranto), and has recently opened a "Citizens' house for the environment and health".

The local committee's work has given rise to the recognition of the community's efforts to obtain the rights in order to decide about its own future and its land. In other words, Manfredonians are working to build an active community that is able to spread consciousness about its prerogative to make decisions involving the social and political dimensions of everyday life. As a result, this research project has become a *history in action*: people's memories about their fight against industrial pollution in Manfredonia has led to acts of resistance, beginning the process towards mitigation and sharing this local experience with other groups.

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## CES

Colégio de S. Jerónimo  
Apartado 3087  
3001-401 Coimbra, Portugal  
T. +351 239 855 570  
F. +351 239 855 589  
[www.ces.uc.pt](http://www.ces.uc.pt)  
[ces@ces.uc.pt](mailto:ces@ces.uc.pt)

## CES - Lisboa

Picoas Plaza  
Rua do Viriato, 13  
Lj 117/118  
1050-227 Lisboa, Portugal  
T. +351 216 012 848  
F. +351 216 012 847  
[www.ces.uc.pt/ces-lisboa](http://www.ces.uc.pt/ces-lisboa)  
[ceslx@ces.uc.pt](mailto:ceslx@ces.uc.pt)

