

Divergent narratives on democracy in the Portuguese social conflict:

A dialect materialist approach

Jonas Van Vossole¹

Abstract

This paper studies the effects of the crisis on democracy. Its methodology is based on a dialectic-materialist approach of ideology. Democracy is approached as a crucial ideological element in the legitimation of capitalist political economy. Molded by the social struggles, democracy evolved in an antagonistic relation with capitalism. Every hegemonic crisis affects the dominant meaning of democracy, creating divergent narratives about it. This is illustrated in the case of Portugal. Policymakers and the Troika still defend the dominant elitist representative democracy. Unions and the old left defend the necessity of social rights, as a substantive part of democracy. The newest social movements demand a participative and deliberative forms. The last section explores some possible hegemonic re-articulations.

Keywords: Crisis, Democracy, Hegemony, Protests, Ideology,

Resumo

Este artigo estuda os efeitos da crise sobre a democracia. A metodologia baseia-se numa aplicação do materialismo dialéctico na área da ideologia. Democracia é abordada como um elemento crucial na legitimação da economia política capitalista. Moldada pelas lutas sociais, a democracia co-evolui numa relação antagonista com o capitalismo. Cada crise hegemónica afecta o significado dominante da democracia, e tende criar narrativas divergentes dela. Isto é ilustrado no caso de Portugal. Os governantes e a Tróica ainda defendem o discurso dominante da democracia representativa elitista. Os sindicatos e a “velha esquerda” defendem a necessidade dos direitos social como parte substantiva da democracia. Os novíssimos movimentos sociais defendem formas participativas e deliberativas. O ultima parte explora possíveis rearticulações hegemónicas.

Palavras-chave: Crise; Democracia; Hegemonia; Protestos; Ideologia.

¹ Doutorando no Programa “Democracia no século XXI” no Centro de Estudo Sociais (CES) Universidade de Coimbra, e em Ciência Política no departamento de Ciências Políticas da Universidade de Gent, Bélgica. O seu projeto de dissertação debruça-se sobre os efeitos da crise económica na legitimidade da democracia. Licenciou-se em Ciência Política na Universidade de Gent, onde também concluiu o seu Mestrado em Relações internacionais e Global Governance e posteriormente um Mestrado em economia geral.

Introduction

This research paper studies the effects of the euro-crisis on the legitimacy of democracy. The crisis has provoked a widespread contestation of the European and Portuguese policies. While popular/national sovereignty is high-jacked by supra-national technocratic policy-makers, wide protests took the streets “reclaiming” democracy. Consequently, the questions of democracy and austerity have become a very hot issue in public debate, both in academic circles, as in everyday conversations.

Within the research field, the definition of democracy has become a very problematic. This methodological difficulty is the starting point for a deeper study into these questions of democracy and its link to the political economic crisis in which I abandon the idea of using a fixed concept of democracy, adopting an analysis that forces us to focus on the interaction of the crisis with the conceptualization of democracy itself. Democracy thus becomes a contested concept, not only within the academic democratic theory, but essentially as an ideological concept, a product of social struggles.

Methodology

Our radical approach to democratic ideology is based on the immanent critique of the (post-)Marxist interpretations of ideology, found in Althusser, Lukacs, Gramsci, Therborn and Zizek. Based on Karl Marx's key notions about ideology - such as (1) the dialectic and materialist analysis of infra and supra-structure of the political economy, (2) the assertion of the “ruling ideology as the ideology of the ruling class”, and (3) Marx’ approach to alienation and (4) to the development of class-consciousness from “klasse an sich” to “klasse fur sich” - they approach ideology as the whole sphere of consciousness in which ideology is built upon a dialectical relation with praxis and political economy. (Therborn 1999, Althusser 1972, Zizek 2006) Ideology refers to how human beings live their life as conscious actors, making sense of things or situations through the interaction with other people; (Therborn 1999) in short it refers to the conscious and subconscious interaction with its material conditions. By no means should this approach of democracy thus be interpreted as idealistic - disregarding the practical forms, practices and relations as a dialectic materialist approach of democracy

considers the dialectic relation between sub- and superstructure of society, and between objective living conditions and human subjectivity.

Approaching democracy “as ideology”, means to “focus on the way it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity”. (Therborn, 1999: 2) Such an approach opposes mainstream political science and comparative politics approach. According to these approaches such as used in Lipset (1959), Huntington (1991), Przeworski (1993), or more recently in “A qualidade da democracia em Portugal: a visão dos cidadãos” by Pinto et al (2013), democracy can just be taken as an empirical concept, with a fixed formal, often categorical definition of democracy. Democracy would thus be a state or situation that could be objectively defined and measured. Democracy is thus de-ideologized as a concept. Such a empirical, positivist approach is problematic given the well-known paradox about ideology within the academic literature – as defended by Slavoj Žižek, Göran Therborn, Eric Swyngedouw and others – that “the non-ideology” or “apolitical position”, is not only a hidden ideology, but that it is “the ideology” at its purest. The power of ideology achieves its highest point, the hegemonic position of an ideology, exactly when its subjects do not recognize it anymore as ideology, but as reality or truth.

The arch-ideological position, dominant in empirical political science departs from a very idealistic formalistic approach of democracy. This becomes particularly clear in classical works of Huntington (1991) or Przeworski (1991) or more recently in the discussion about the different predictors for democracy and their relation of causality with “democracy”, such as in Pedro Magalhaes’ (2013) study of the relation between efficacy and democracy. Besides the ideological perspective hidden behind these positivistic approaches, the lack of a dialectical approach brings in errors of formal logic. As relations of causality cannot be proven, the so-called predictors are themselves potentially the product of the studied processes; and therefore unreliable, particularly in times of crisis which affect and transform their meanings.

Democracy

Democracy as we know it, is a constitutive concept in the governance of modern societies². In pre-modern European societies, feudal lords were not owners of the means of production, but were entitle to make use of the land based on allegiance, services to the their lord, military alliances and family-inheritance. The production-system was based on small community-production and the extraction of surplus labor of the serfs which had to relay on the powers and means of the state (Santos, 1995). The legitimacy of governance structure was usually based on theological legitimation, family rights, bloodline and military force.(Therborn, 1999: 55-61) In modern societies however, the production-system changed and so did its base of legitimacy. Opposing the aristocratic ideology and reflecting the new organization of the market-economy; a new bourgeois ideology developed. Instead of blood-rights, inheritance and theological legitimation, rationality became the dominant epistemology, while social relations were legitimized based on free contracts/exchange/competition and efficiency. The idea of a sovereign ruling by the will of god was replaced by the idea of sovereignty of the people and democracy.

Therborn (1977) identifies some tendencies that induced the democratic possibility of capitalism: Capitalism, at least in its initial phase, engenders (1) the establishment of centralized states and the necessity of national unification. At the same time, there is (2) a tendency towards internal competition within the ruling class, and (3) the impersonal role of exploitation involving rather the rule of capital than personal domination of the bourgeoisie, enables other classes to co-govern a capitalist state. Furthermore capitalism engenders (4) an inherent tendency of economic growth en technological development which creates room for temporary social compromises.

These tendencies do not make democracy inherent to capitalism, however, nor makes is there a simple relation of complementarity. Instead bourgeois democracy and capitalism have most often an antagonistic relationship, similar to a dialectic unity. This antagonistic relation derives from the opposition between its important legitimizing function – which is based on the appearance that the governance is based on the will of the people – and the capitalist governance system it has to legitimize – which is

² This is - of course - not an exclusive relation, as also other historical moments and geographical places have had systems that were claimed to be democratic.

based upon the rule of capitalist accumulation in which social relations are structured by commodity fetishism. This antagonism led to the division between a public and a private sphere in capitalist societies; an ideological division between the political and the economy. In first instance this division was meant to keep the king or state out of the private affairs of the rising bourgeois class. (Habermas 1991) Since then - what we consider democracy today - changed as product of continuous struggles of social emancipation against capitalism. The Labour movement – itself the product of capitalist development - has been the major driving force for this in Western societies. (Therborn 1977) In the class-struggle between Bourgeoisie and Proletariat: bourgeois democracy and the division between public and private, took the role of restricting the influence of the upcoming politically organized working class. Its aim is directed to the naturalization of capitalist economic exploitation in the private realm of civil society (Santos 1995: 414), while guaranteeing a truly constitutional public state, not the private legal possession of any specific group (santos 1995: 415). Its struggle for social emancipation, particularly after the first world war - following a pre-war emancipatory movements and general strikes, in an environment of social turmoil following the human and social disaster of the war, and particularly after its first consequences emerged during the Russian Revolution in 1917 – has been directed in a institutionalization of political democracy. The economic and political elites in western-Europe quickly went over to the implementation of universal (men) voting rights in parliamentary elections in order to co-opt the leadership of the organized proletariat. This process gives the purely formal democracy a substance through an extension of democratic participation and the establishment of social rights and the social welfare state.

Democratic legitimacy

Legitimacy is the notion of “the right to govern”. (Bodansky 1999) It always rests on the shared acceptance of rules and rule by affected communities and on justificatory norms recognized by the relevant community. As such, it is founded in a collective audience’s shared belief, that ‘the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.’ (Bernstein 2004) It is part of an ideological construction, that “the existing

political organization is the most appropriate” and makes existing power-relations acceptable. (Lipset 1959) While earlier generations of scholars viewed legitimacy as functional for making rulers ‘more secure in the possession of power and more successful in its exercise’, more critical authors also focus on how legitimacy justifies authority and domination, and can thus also be a source of power, enabling some policies or practices while proscribing others. (Bernstein 2004)

Traditionally, there are 2 approaches to legitimacy. The normative approach, is an evaluation made on the basis of moral grounds (Buchanan & Keohane 2006), and refers to whether a claim of authority is justified in some objective sense. (Bodansky 1999) The sociological approach - or “popular legitimacy” approach in the literature - , considers the public’s attitudes about the institution as a source of rules. Legitimacy is thus dependent on the practical attitude and is thus as an empirical phenomenon. (Buchanan & Keohane 2006) Here also, a dialectical materialist approach enables us to understand this apparent opposition. A dialectical relation exists between the material, empirical dimension of legitimacy on one hand and an ideal, moral dimension on the other hand. Together they form a dialectical unity, as a sociologic, empirical movement questioning the existing order can only exist if it projects alternative forms of legitimacy to mobilize discontent. At the same time, moral grounds for legitimacy, do not exist by themselves and are constructed within the empirical material struggle, depending on established or changing conditions. From a dialectic materialist perspective, the opposition between both is crucial, because it is this antagonism which creates the necessary space for political agency at the center of legitimacy, and thus a source for social change.

When we consider democracy as a base for legitimacy; the empirical existence of democratic legitimacy is thus dependent on the social consensus about what democracy “is” or “should be”. This implies a democratic hegemony, and thus that there is a power, or Gramscian-style power-coalition, which sustains a hegemonic interpretation and institutionalization of democracy. Therefore we can look towards the previously discussed historical antagonist co-evolution of Western European democratization with capitalism as a sequence of different power-coalitions and configurations based on compromises between the working class, peasants, internal fractions of the bourgeoisie and other groups in society. (Therborn 1977)

In recent decades, the social consensus in Europe was based upon the Washington-consensus. With the collapse of “real socialism”, the main alternative for capitalism disappeared ; leading to neoliberal hegemony and Fukuyama’s (1992) “End of History”. In what Huntingtons’ (1991) called the “third wave”, democracy hegemonized as governance principle but paradoxically reduced it to “low-intensity democracy” (Gills et al 1993, Santos 2003). Neoliberal ideology sustains a perspective that a society is most efficient when based on market-efficiency and competition. (Brown 2011) In such a new “post-political” (Swyngedouw 2007) or “post-democratic” world, management took the place of politics (Ranciere, 1998); democratic power was restricted through neoliberal policies and globalization. Neoliberal hegemony assumes liberal democratic capitalism as the end of human evolution. It serves as the base for the hegemonic interpretation of democracy today, the elitist liberal model (Santos 2012). Based on Schumpeter’s’(1942) model, it restricts democracy to the electoral choice between elites, within ever more restricted public sphere

Although democratic participation declined (Santos 2005), neoliberal ideology so far remained uncontested; meaning that the liberal-democratic elitist procedural legitimation sufficed. The current “state of democratic theory” (Shapiro 2006) reflects this. We find a liberal kernel in all dominant schools; not only in democratic elitism of Shumpeter (1942) and Przeworski (1999) and positivist empiricism as in Huntington (1993) and Pinto (2013), but also in the the critical deliberativism such as Benhabib (1996) and Habermas (1998) and even in the radical and agonistic schools such as in early Zizek, Butler(2000), Mouffe and Laclau (1985). Even Sousa Santos (2009) admits his concept “democratizing democracy” represents an answer to the lack of alternatives to capitalist globalization. While criticizing the liberal approach, they generally don’t go to the end; with the detachment of democracy from the organization of the political economy; democratic theory restricts itself to idealist models and pragmatism.

Semi-peripheral democracy

Although the liberal model achieved nearly universal characteristics, in its peripheral regions, the question of its particular application becomes more complex. In dependent capitalist nations, the internal dynamics of the ruling class are largely

dependent on an external center. The economic base is extremely fragile and vulnerable to international crisis; this reduces the room for maneuver and social compromise on which modern western democracy is built. The dependence on external economic interests hinders the development of impersonal rule. Their peripheral position during the age of industrialization limited the development of a modern industrial economy, and with it the growth of the organized labour movement. All these factors have been crucial in the development of democracy in the core. (Therborn 1977)

The consequence has been a very dubious relation between the Portuguese ruling class and the national state and consequently to national democracy. Sousa Santos (2012) defends that for one - internationalized - fraction the national state is too small. It looks abroad for export-markets, partners and investment opportunities. It pushed Portugal towards European integration after the loss of the colonial empire, as Europe meant a “solution” for the role it was never able to develop. (Santos 2012) Europe should have been an incentive to reform the judicial system, to regulate corruption, develop national infrastructure and enable Portugal, to enter the Globalized world on a stronger basis. The other fraction was just too underdeveloped and localized to have any dominant influence on public policies. It had to retract to corruption and fiscal evasion as a dominant political strategy towards the state. (Santos 2012 :61) These para-statal informal power structures and networks of corruption and nepotism – which served as an alternative for the bourgeois centralized state (Ruivo 2000) - undermine the project for a liberal-democratic Rechtsstaat.

As a symbolic contrast with the Estado Novo dictatorship, democracy nevertheless occupied a particular position in the trans-class consensus after the revolutionary period. Key for this consensus about democracy was a compromise based upon the “ideas of the revolution” and “Europe”. The revolution echoed social justice and equality, and institutionalized in the late development of a – feeble - welfare state with social rights including free education and a universal healthcare system. (Santos 2012) “Europe” meant the perspective of economic and technological development, the promise of accessing “civilization”, and opening of new markets for the elites, as well as an escape from the internal economic and social conflicts of the PREC through supra-national governance and subsidies.(Lobo 2003, 2011, Santos 2012)

Democracy and Crisis

As long as power-relations didn't change, there was no breaking up of the consensus which sustains the dominant hegemony. Here the dynamics of the political economy are crucial. The current crisis in Portugal - consequence of the complex dynamics behind the global financial crisis and the internal imbalances within the European capitalist unification resulting in the Eurocrisis – has brought an end to the Portuguese consensus about democracy (as it has done in other peripheral countries).³ The concept of crisis is crucial here. Crisis refers to an internal contradiction within the system itself, as if it would be a dysfunction of an organism. (Habermas 1975) It is not primarily an external condition, but the consequence of a qualitative change within the system itself, based on a historical quantitative accumulative process. The imbalances in the euro-area and the unsustainability of the public and private debt are the consequence of a long process of neoliberal economic and monetary unification and capitalist globalization. These led to a deterioration of the national economy, debt-fueled growth and ultimately to a loss of sovereignty to financial capitalism.

Just as the political-economic processes that led to it, the divergence of ideas about democracy is not really a new situation. The perceived loss of sovereignty is only a accumulation of a long-term process of transfer of decision making authorities to the supra-national level. (Verney and Bosco, 2012) In the same way, different narratives about democracy have their predecessors. Portuguese citizens already had a high distrust in the political elite before the crisis, (Santos 2012) and this fact is exemplified by previous high rates of non-participation and abstention during elections, etc. (Pinto et al, 2013) Moreover, many of the narratives we found are built upon collective memories of past social struggles and established forms of organization.

The electoral system has been one of the “transfer-mechanisms” (Habermas 1975) through which the crisis manifested itself on the level of democracy. Electorally, the cost of the crisis for parties from incumbent governments has been very high in all peripheral economies. (Verney and Bosco 2012, Bellucci, Lobo & Lewis-Beck 2012) The

³ The crisis is the consequence of an interplay between dynamics of geographical uneven development (Hadjimichalis 2011), neoliberal financial deregulation, the consequences of monetary unification in a non-optimal currency-area (De Grauwe 2010) and has been deepened by the austerity-policies themselves (Krugman 2012).

deepening crisis of the euro-crisis led to the downfall of Greek, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese Governments. However, a number of interrelated factors made that the electoral system as such could not uphold legitimacy, and to contain it. The main factor was certainly the depth and length of the crisis that continued over different elections, “burning” both the governmental parties as their previously official oppositions. This happened in Portugal, where the PS-government was ousted in the 2011 elections, but the PSD has since then also lost most its legitimacy. Generally, the crisis thus led to a decay in electoral legitimacy, with a “growth of abstention, increasing parliamentary fragmentation and the emergence of new political forces, notably those expressing anti-party, extreme right-wing or even racist positions” with a “tendency towards the bypassing of political parties as a means of political participation”.(Verney and Bosco, 2012) To avoid these developments, in some countries such as in Greece and Italy, elections were even considered a luxury country couldn’t afford. (Verney and Bosco, 2012).

Divergent Democratic discourses today

The contradictions in the economy have put a huge pressure on the democratic consensus in Portugal, and consequently the crisis has reflected itself into the democratic ideology, particularly into a hegemonic crisis of democracy. As a result of the crisis the liberal elitist democratic hegemony disrupts into the emergence of a range of different – often contradicting - narratives reflecting different historical backgrounds and social positions. The result of such a hegemonic crisis is what Boaventura Sousa Santos (2007: lxiii) would call a demo-diversity; “the peaceful or conflicting coexistence [...] of different models and practices of democracy”⁴. While the governing elite - based on the liberal elitist interpretation of democracy - still considers itself as the only legitimate elected representatives of the people, the personification

⁴ This concept was inspired by the initial ideological struggle about the meaning of democracy involved continuous processes of reinterpretation in the Portuguese post-revolutionary period. (Soutelo 2012) He develops this concept as a historical description, but also as a means of emancipation, an inspiration of alternatives against the situation of liberal hegemony he calls a “democratic monoculture”. I question the utility of using both “peaceful or conflicting coexistence”, as between “peacefull” and “conflictual” there is a dialectic relation, having different temporalities that are not clarified in the term, and thus reflect different political meanings. But critique of the concept of demo-diversity will be presented in a future version of this work.

of democracy and reason, this is disputed by ever larger layers of the population during the protests.

Crucial is how it interacted with the ideas of “Europe” and “the revolution”. Once the two concepts stood for the consensus about democracy. Today’s incommensurability between both symbolizes the emerged dissensus. For the ruling class, Europe still means civilization, financial and economic salvation, and necessary technical reforms,- that serve as the base for any democratic society. Protestors, however see it as undemocratic, unjust, capital-oriented, core-dominated and equalize it with a foreign occupation. A similar thing happens to the “ideas of the revolution”. Its constitution and social rights are seen by the democratically elected government as unsustainable; a threat to the Portuguese economy. Its application by the constitutional court is degraded as “political activism”. For the opponents of austerity “the conquests of the revolution” are a safeguard against the illegitimate government policies. The revolution represents the rights which are taken away, it represent the resistance against “authoritarian rule” of a “privileged elite”. This tension between “Europe” and the “revolution” reflects the tension between so-called “responsiveness” and “responsibility”, between voters’ demands and the constraints of government management imposed by the crisis, which is found in scientific explanations of the governance crisis (Verney and Bosco 2012, p 151). As all sides of the conflict still claim to uphold democracy, the dissensus is projected into differing interpretations of the concept of democracy itself.

We mainly observe these divergences between policymakers and protestors. The governing elite and the Troika still reflects the old liberal narrative: the crisis has led to some pressure on the political body but the government has all the democratic legitimacy to implement the measures it deems necessary, as elections have provided it with a parliamentary majority. What happened after these elections is not taken into consideration, not even the role of future elections remains as a form of accountability. In this context, Pedro Passos Coelho (Publico 2012), the Portuguese Prime minister even stated “Fuck elections, what matters is Portugal”. Appealing to the values of “stat-responsibility” affirming that the members of parliament are “not elected to win elections”. Any alternative policy is considered as irresponsible as the policy-measures are highly conditioned by the international framework and a technocratic governance,

necessary to reclaim some sovereignty in the future. A representative of the Troika (2013) affirmed that “protests are good because they show the existent vitality of democracy”, however they only represent a parliamentary minority. This protesting minority should be granted the liberal freedom of expression, but not more than that. Consequently protests have to be peaceful and symbolic; whereas it is implied that they will not change anything in the necessary reforms.

When asked about their perspective on the state of democracy, protestors on the other hand generally draw a very dark picture: Generally the judgment is that democracy disappeared or is in very bad condition. Commonly recorded arguments to prove the veracity of this judgment are attributed to a loss of sovereignty, corruption, loss of social rights, lack of popular support for government policies, lies in the electoral program, etc. This comes together with a general lack of confidence in political parties and in the parliamentary system as such.

But the divergences do not only manifest themselves between protestors and policymakers. The hegemonic breakdown and the emptying of Democracy as the Master-signifier have also led to the manifestation of other divergences which are addressed in terms of democracy. We see a part of the right, members of the governing parties and the economic elite aligning with the protestors arguments and questioning the legitimacy of the government, given the loss of national sovereignty and the effects of the neoliberal policies on the internal markets.

Also within the protestors movements we can observe divergences. Within the Indignado movement Classic divides emerged such as ‘conflict versus compromise’ in decision making, and thus about voting procedures or deciding by consensus. There existed disagreements about the establishment of more permanent structures in the meetings or not, the possibility of having representatives or spokesmen, the agreement of topic-specific working groups, the time-limits of deliberation, the acceptance of organized groups within the debates, etc... While the common effects of the Global character of the financial crisis and the Euro-crisis strengthened cosmopolitan international solidarities, such as the initiatives around “Global Spring”, at the same time the external interventions strengthened the more nationalist appeal of national sovereignty in other layers. The divergence is even wider if we compare with the perspectives of other oppositional groups, organizations and parties which were not

active in the acampada movement or quitted the acampadas during the debates due to what some called “unworkability”, “lack of freedom of organization” or even “undemocratic methods”.

New struggles for Hegemony

These last paragraphs of this research paper, are dedicated to some reflections that go beyond the divergence of democratic narratives, but also address some possible convergences. From a Marxist perspective, every socio-political struggle is a dialectical interaction between practice and ideas, between change of material conditions and ideology, between an empirical dimension of mobilization and a moral dimension of judgement. Consequently the search for political change among the protest movements against austerity and the social consequences of the crisis is also search for alternative forms of democratic legitimation. As, protestors try to justify their struggles in an effort to mobilize themselves, their struggle involves a search for new narratives or signifiers. This process is the process of judgement; a reflection that constructs a bridge between worsening material condition and an ideological narrative that explains “why the situation is bad and we need to mobilize, in order to be able to change”.

The process of protest is a process of joint actions, in which co-construct activists, groups and organizations narratives. It integrates conscious and unconscious “discursive coalition” formations through the struggles. Political struggles have the aim to establish their particular judgments as universalities. One could characterize these attempts of hegemonic re-articulations - such as described by Gramsci (2011). Here I will shortly discuss three examples of such possible re-articulations that we can find in the Portuguese context: socio-economic articulation, anti-political articulation, and the nationalist discourse. There is, however, no clear distinction between the previously discussed divergence and these re-articulations. More-over, these re-articulations, discursive coalitions, transgress classes and identities; which makes that there don't exist clear dividing lines between them, the division is a mere categorization for analysis.

The first narrative addresses what orthodox Marxism would consider class consciousness; the transformation from specific social conditions in the mode of production (Klasse an sich) to a political mobilization around this identity (Klasse fur

sich). This narrative frames the problem for democracy as a socio-economic problem and has been very visible since the very beginning of the crisis. It is reflected in the mobilizations of trade unions, new social movements and the left mobilizing against attacks on living conditions, against cuts in public services against impoverishment and unemployment. The narrative blames the capitalist structure and the pro-capitalist oriented policies for the social conditions of the crisis. It is within this narrative that we should categorize slogans such as “We will not pay their crisis”, “we are the 99%”, “international solidarity among the PIIGS”, etc... This narrative claims to be defending democracy on the base of its substance, by defending social rights, social justice against the domination of a small economic elite and “the financial markets”. It claims that the dominant narrative – of the policymakers – is undemocratic, as the influence of the financial markets and European technocracy restricts or even annihilates political choice.

More radical layers however, the indignados and acampada movement in particular, started from the same condition but radicalized the revolt. Demanding “Democracia real já” (real democracy now!) they confronted the existent institutionalization of democracy. This “real democracy” reflected broad oppositions against the limits of liberal representative democracy. There seemed to be a consensus on the necessary extension – or at least a status quo - of substantive and procedural dimensions of democracy - Gills et al (1993) and Sousa Santos and Avritzer (2005) would call it a more “high intensity democracy” contrasting with its (neo)liberal-democratic “low-intensity” form. A part of the opposition, however concentrated primarily on the question of representativeness as a form, and thus depoliticized the issue.

The consequence is that the revolt came to be canalized in a narrative which went from oppositions against the existing representative system to opposition of “political party” and even a condemnation of “the political” as such. This narrative, gaining a wide representation in society, - particularly voiced among indignado’s, anarchists and populists parties - frames “politicians”, “the political system” or politics in general as corrupt and bad. The problem of democracy would be a problem of the predominance of personal and collective “interests” by corrupt politicians and businessmen over the common good. As an alternative; real democracy should be based on policies consensus and general interest.

Strangely, this kind of a narrative among the protestor opens a window for another kind of depoliticized or anti-politicized articulation with the other side of the socio-economic conflict. Ironically a big part of its discourse perfectly fits with the dominant neoliberal depoliticized ideology; which blames the crisis of mismanagement and corruption of the political cast.⁵

A third more recent re-articulation seems to occur along the lines of a nationalist rhetoric. This narrative links the problems of democracy and the crisis-situation to the question of the Euro. According to this narrative, it is the Euro-project which caused the crisis. Democracy is endangered by the policies to maintain the currency, resulting in a lack of political choices and a lack of national sovereignty. Since the beginning, such a line of thought has been part of the repertoire of the PCP, recently it was reflected in their campaign for “a patriotic and left government”. Other players have also adopted part of this nationalist narrative. Among the radical left they include the MAS (Movimento Alternativa Socialista) which campaigns for a referendum on the euro-exit. In their statement “Portugal should fight to recover its political sovereignty”, their president Gil Garcia(2014) claims: “Portugal, the oldest independent nation of Europe, is every time less and less master of its own strategic decisions. Because of this, and because the counterparts to remain in the euro and the EU are blackmail and permanent cuts (through debt) in salaries and pensions of millions of workers, particularly in half a million civil servants (sic)”. Lately it was also found in the “Political guide for the European [elections]”, a manifesto by Alexandre Abreu, João Rodrigues e Nuno Teles (2013) in which they defend a euro-exit and sovereign monetary policy as an exit of the crisis.

Conclusions

The dialectic materialist analysis showed that the economic crisis is reflected in emerging contradictions in the narratives about democracy. These narratives range from the formal elitist perspective of the policymakers to a purely substantive view on the side of the trade unions, while the *acampada* movement expressed wide range of models and deliberative practices. The lack of consensus about the meaning of democracy because of lack of social consensus explains in part the problem of the

⁵ A more extensive argument will be developed in my book-chapter of “Beyond Indignados”, 2014

legitimacy of democracy in Southern Europe. A common element of all narratives however, is that they all defended their perspectives within the democratic framework. It provides an explanation for the reason why there are institutions considered to be democratic by one of the sides of the conflict while at the same time, anti-democratic by another, providing a level of legitimacy to the possibility that it may be overthrown or neglected. It can help to explain how democracy can become obsolete in spite of public convictions they defend democracy.

Zizek's (2006: 37) Parallax view on democracy proposes that today's "struggle for democracy [...] is in what it will mean". In the last part of this article we discussed three narratives, or signifiers that in their struggle give a different particular content to the Democratic, empty Master-signifier: the socio-economic, the anti-political and the nationalist. It will depend on the future struggles, which (combinations) of these narratives will guide the future of democracy in Portugal.

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