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This essay explores within the frame of "defining democracy" to what extent the rising global protest movements could suggest new approaches to and practices of democracy to lead the way out the "crisis of democracy". Turning to radical theories of democracy, which conceptualize democracy as a hegemonic project, thus provide "practical" visions of "functioning" democracies, the emphasis is on more "radicalized" approaches to democracy which envision a "democratization of all areas of everyday life", to bring about new forms of democracy, that rest on "equal" share in deciding about the "coordinates of social coexistence".

"Your questions are false if you already know the answer."

José Saramago

On Democracy and a New Vision of Democracy

The European Union has declared 2013 as the European Year of Citizens, not only to celebrate the 20th anniversary of EU citizenship, but also as an expression of the sociopolitical necessity to create social cohesion among EU citizens, who distance themselves from the EU project as a whole. The global economical and financial crisis generated a "democratic deficit", which emerged as primary dilemma of the EU. Despite all efforts of the EU institutions, actors and policies to dismantle this deficit discursively and practically, skepticism towards (EU) democracy is growing.

Therefore the agenda of "questioning democracy" was forced upon the EU governance from below, as a further outcome and claim of the rising European and global social movements.

The attempts to institutionally and constructively increase the inclusion of EU citizens within the participatory and representative structures of the EU promoting "active citizenship" and "active democracy" as a remedy for democracy's sui generis lack is also evident in political theory.

In terms of system theory the insufficiency of dividing democratic legitimation into *output* (as policy outcomes *for* the people) and *input* (as participation *by* the people) has been complemented by a third normative criterion for the evaluation of the effectiveness and responsiveness of EU governance, namely *throughput*. It is suggested that "throughput legitimacy (...) is judged in terms of the efficacy, accountability and transparency of EU's governance processes along with their inclusiveness and openness to consultation *with* the people" (Schmidt, 2013, p. 2).

The "black box" of EU governance has been targeted from several strands of political theory, seeking and suggesting institutional and constructive *throughput* processes by a more interaction-oriented approach (Bonde, 2011). This encompasses "the accountability of those engaged in making the decisions, the transparency of the information and the inclusiveness and openness to civil society" (Schmidt, 5ff.). But still these approaches do not succeed in democratizing the political process itself.

One of the crucial questions for determining our prerequisites regarding democracy should be the following then: Are we trying to legitimize and maintain a supranational order, in which the EU citizens should be converted into responsible "engaged" citizens and agents, "active citizens" who should serve, uphold and strengthen the given EU values, norms and goals (Giroux, 2005); or are we "progressive" in the manner of preparing the ground for a discussion, that will open up questions of conflict and critique, which are at the heart of democracy and which bear the potential to enable people to shape change? If we should agree on the latter as our starting point, consequently an even more important question arises: Are we ready to be among the (en)actors of that change, do we really want to promote that change and are we equipped to deal with its sociopolitical consequences? Only an elaborate answer to these questions will provide the necessary tools to conceptualize a progressive theoretical framework of "democracy".

My article is concerned with critical and radical approaches to democracy, which dismantle "democracy" within a political and theoretical approach *"that is committed to non-domination"* (Badiou, cited in Demirovic, 2013b, p. 371).

Starting from this primary reference point, I will first draw on approaches to democracy that underline the contested dimensions of pluralist and participatory democracy that hence produce a "conflictual consensus" (Mouffe, 2012). Departing from there and marking the limits of this constitutional concept I will refer to a more "radicalized" approach to democracy, that distances itself from such an ontological statism and envisions a concept of democracy, which comprises a "democratization of all areas of everyday life" (Demirovic, 2013a). Thirdly, I will relate to the current global protest movements, claiming "real democracy" far beyond participatory and deliberative inclusion to decision-making processes, as forms and expressions of enacting de facto freedom, "rather than asking for it" (Drexler, 2007, p. 14). I suggest then, that this locus might well provide a totally new perception and conceptualization of democracy.

Democracy as a Hegemonic Project and Conflictual Consensus

The term democracy holds the political claim that people rule themselves, "that the whole rather than a part or an Other is politically sovereign", thus lacks specificity of its features and appears as an "unfinished principle" (Brown, 2010, para. 3). So the term itself does not specify, "*what* powers must be shared for the people's rule to be practiced, *how* this rule is to be organized, nor by *which* institutions or supplemental conditions it is enabled or secured" (Brown, 2010, para. 3). Since it is obvious that people do not rule themselves, democratic theory had to come up with a lot of answers, some to maintain and promote the rule of the few, and others to unmask the illusion of the rule of many.

Radical and feminist critiques of modern liberal democracy have yet revealed that not only the rule of the people was basically the rule of men (Phillips, 1998; Kreisky et al., 2001; Sauer, 2004), but also that pluralist approaches and participatory forms of democracy sustained domination and fostered inequality. Although participatory models of democracy aim to secure the sovereignty of the whole, they are nevertheless consisted of "structural selectivities" (Jessop, 2001), which are based upon hierarchical forms of exclusion and contested power relations. The production of consensus, inherent in democratic processes, is regarded in that sense as a struggle for hegemony, a continuous process (Gramsci, 1971), which rests on conflictual everyday negotiations, through which policies and new hegemonies are generated (Demirovic, 1997). Within these consensus-finding processes "civil society" appears mostly as a reinforcement of certain domination structures of particular hegemonic blocs (Brand et al., 2001).

Democracy in that sense is not just conceived as deliberative and rational participation in decision-making, nor is it limited to a form of governing or constitutional framework as the mainstream theories of liberal democracy suggest. Democracy is rather conceived as a field of power relations and social practices (Brown 1995, p. 174), which permanently reinstate subordination and a coercive consent that masks and sustains certain forms and practices of domination (Ranciere, 2011; Badiou, 2011).

Chantal Mouffe's concept of "agonism" suggested some ways out of this dilemma, where she defines conflict, the distinction that is based on a we/they, as structurally inherent in the foundation of all kinds of collective identities. The necessary task for democratic politics would be then to provide the formal institutions and practices, where these antagonisms can be fought out. Hence through these institutions the conflicts could be "sublimated and transformed into "agonism"" (Mouffe, 2012, p. 632), "a relationship of "adversaries", […] [who] share a common symbolic space

and they recognize, at least to some degree, the legitimacy of the claims of their opponents" (Mouffe, 2012, p. 633).

Within this framework Mouffe further suggests solutions for the crisis of democracy and for the challenges that EU faces, by identifying the attempts of EU governance to construct a "homogeneous post-national "we"" as a primary threat to European integration (Mouffe, 2012, p. 634). This very negation of national collective identities within the EU would consequently create the resistance to European integration and could even generate "multiple forms of antagonisms" between the different nations of the EU (Mouffe, 2012, p. 634).

Hence the democratic solution for Mouffe lies in the "pluralization of hegemonies", a multipolar order, a "pluriverse": A coexistence of large regional units, that would acknowledge diversity and heterogeneity and share a conflictual consensus on the values of human rights and democracy, albeit recognizing "that the western form of liberal democracy is not the only way in which the democratic ideal can be institutionalized" (Mouffe, 2012, p. 638f.) She concludes by envisioning the EU as "one important region in this multipolar world", taking over the role of a vanguard of such an "agonistic pluralism" (Mouffe, 2012, p. 639) that will subdue inevitable antagonisms via their expressions through agonist pluralist institutions.

Mouffe's concept, despite affirming the conflictual dimension of consent and the moment of constitutive action is yet limited through a formal constitutional framework, which links and hence limits democracy per se with the state, generating an ontological statism.

This picture further envisions political regimes and their regional blocs as internally homogeneous, without questioning if and to what degree these internal relations are democratic (Demirovic, 2013a, p. 212). In that sense, as long as these antagonisms are fought out via legitimate political channels, "everyday democratic conflict about general definite decisions, which probably violate the interests of individuals and groups" (ibid.)[1], seems irrelevant for Mouffe. Hereby she re-inscribes the logic of hegemony on a regional scale and further ignores the crucial insight that material social relations that comprise domination and inequalities, such as the sphere of economy and labor relations, are prior to agents and shape political action (Leggett, 2013, p. 310).

As such Mouffe's vision of democracy is limited through the "liberal" perception of democracy, not aimed to "create a completely different kind of society'" (Conway & Singh, 2011, p. 692), but in which "democracy is defined as a sphere of the "general", where the "conflictual process of the

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[1] Translated by the author

enactment and constitution of this "general" is per se regarded in positive terms", ignoring the "societal conditions that necessitate such a conflictual action in the first place" (Demirovic, 2013, p. 212)[2]. Hence this project attempts to contain capitalism within the economic sphere dwelling on a "social-democratic vision of national state regulation of the capitalist economy, guided by a form of political liberalism" (Conway & Singh, 2011, p. 692).

Drawing on these critiques, which point to the limits of such a vision of democracy, that as such reinforces an "asymmetric compromise" (Demirovic, 2013, p. 212) I turn to more radical approaches of democracy, the very locus of these critiques.

"Radicalizing" Democracy

If neither the attempts to "democratize" political institutions and processes, nor the claim of totality of the "general", which is enacted through agonistic processes are convincing to be offering a genuine "real" democracy, where do we turn to?

It is about "dispelling the aura of democracy", questioning the "untouchable emblem" of democracy as "the only way to make truth out of the world we're living in" (Badiou, 2011, p. 6f.), to put it in Badiou's words.

Badiou draws on Plato to show, how the concept of democracy as an "emblem", one which is only reserved for "democrats", thus containing no "reality", no real world, nor real truth, promotes an individualistic "pleasure seeking" social order (Badiou, 2011, p. 7f.), which has to be reinvented. It is about "setting collective existence free of the grip of this organization" (Badiou, 2011, p. 14), an organization where "democracy equals monetary abstraction" (Badiou, 2011, p. 14), freeing politics from the subordination to power, manifesting it as "a force in the breast of the assembled and active people driving the State and its laws to extinction" (Badiou, 2011, p. 14). This points to the direction of a reinvented social order, as an "aristocracy for everybody" referring to the literal meaning of democracy as "the power of the people over their own existence", "politics immanent in the people" (Badiou, 2011, p. 15).

So, where do we go from here? Far from establishing democratic socialism and trapped within a reinforced capitalist order, one has to articulate left strategies within this environment without falling into a "left melancholy" (Brown, 1999), which constantly reinstates "democracy as an empty signifier" (Brown, 2010).

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[2] Translated by the author

The sphere of formal institutional politics has obviously reached its limits to present a new rhetoric and vision of democracy though, trapped in its own crisis of democracy, clearly unable to convince the "people" of its good will. "We won't pay for your crisis", the sovereign answered, so who is the "we" here and whose crisis is this really?

Alex Demirovic (2013) emphasizes that there have always been cycles of crisis of democracy in history, which are determined by the compromises between social classes, but the particularity of the current one is standing in relation to the development of a finance-dominated accumulation regime, as an outcome of continuous deregulation and privatization of public property (Demirovic, 2012, para. 13). These developments brought about a new form of an exceptional state and state practices, which departs from well-established authoritarian statism and constitutes a new form of "governmentalized austerity state", which is ruled by a "crisis management" of financial "experts", who are not responsible to parliament and further more all have close connections to the financial industry (Demirovic 2013a, p. 196f.).

In short: Negotiations and decisions that have profound effects on the everyday live of people and populations are enacted "outside of the framework of democratic procedures and publicly controlled responsibilities" (Demirovic, 2012, para. 16).

What happens if people and even parliaments are de facto disabled to "participate" in decisions that concern their everyday, their wages, their ecological environment, their prospects of "living in dignity"? Ranging from *Occupy* New York, to *Blockupy* Frankfurt, from the *15 M Movement* in Spain to the student revolts in the UK and Greece, from the *Tent Movement* in Israel to the *Gezi Park Protests* in Turkey, all of which are enacted within "formal democracies", there is a hint to the fact that vast dimensions of "democracy" have reached its limits (Della Porta, 2013). This rising "myth" of enacting freedom, the obvious "politics immanent in the people" has to be taken into account before any further deliberation on democracy.

These social movements have been given "politically" no value so far (Zizek, 2013), regarding their effect on mainstream politics and perpetuated more the fear of a fallback into nationalist extremisms.

Nevertheless the global formation of such movements definitely points to the main locus of the crisis: The formation of a truly "undemocratic" austerity regime operating in parallel with the formal democratic-parliamentary state, hence largely excluding parliaments and populations from political decision-making processes (Demirovic, 2012).

So the magic lies in the realization that without a democratization of the economy, the labor relations and the dismantling of the merging of corporate and state power as primary feature of

democracies today, it is rather pointless to talk about democracy. Far more any deliberations that are not hinting to this very locus, any policies that are generated within deliberative, participatory and agonistic modes of relations and processes that don't bring about solutions regarding this locus will fail to be relevant.

Democracy further will remain to be an "empty signifier", as long as democracy is structurally linked to the state level and fails to recognize that all are "equal", in the sense of deciding "equally" about the "coordinates of social coexistence" (Demirovic, 2013a, p. 214).

Improper Democracy

The people "on the streets" have fiercely presented, that their interests of solidarity, equality, freedom; mutual respect and acknowledgement of alternative lifestyles, genders, sexualities; priority of ecology; resistance against devastating capital accumulation and marketing of consumerism; and the democratization of labor relations and fiscal policies are not on the agenda of the "democrats".

What the protesting crowds mutually generate is a new collective "we", who sympathizes, supports, and participates in the "resistance" throughout the globe. In the eye of the different political contexts and reasons, constitutional frameworks and cultures out of which various social movements emerge, this new collective "we" is rather unconventional.

This global contestatory practice, "excitement" and spontaneity, this "oppositional performative action" (Drexler, 2007) not only disrupts the "proper" political sphere, but further comprises new modes and models of "living democracy", whereas examining these expressions could provide a totally new discourse and rhetoric of democracy.

Ethnographic studies looking at "direct democracy and a politics of becoming" which are enacted throughout the global protest movements in form of ad-hoc committees, assemblies, and various forms of "coexistence" (Razsa & Kurnik, 2012) could provide a fruitful potential for taking the discourse of democracy to a new level.

Zizek lately denounced this "myth of non-representative direct self-organisation" (Zizek, 2013), what appears to him as "the last trap, the deepest illusion that should fall, that is most difficult to renounce." (Zizek, 2013, para. 8). He rather emphasized that these forms of "self-government of freely associated people" (Demirovic, 2012, para. 9), who actually would "not know what they want" were not able to generate an overall emancipative transformation of the society, without a leader and a political elite (Zizek, 2013, para. 8).

What is obviously immanent in these formations of protest and self-government though, is the fact that they increasingly challenge and exceed the limits of state and governance, which are so far clueless about how to "direct" these forms of "oppositional performative actions" to legitimate and proper channels of constitutional and representative democracy.

Currently, the only policy that "representatives" of democracy on a global scale mutually generate in order to "deal with" these rising manifestations of opposition is a reinforced security state, where police forces violently "secure" the public spheres from its "invaders" and "disrupters". New laws are enacted, which ensure that people are hindered of protest and regarded as terrorists or threats to state security, such as the "National Defense Act" in the USA or the new "Police Law" in Turkey, which ensure the further systematic and structural erosion of democracy.

> "A new regulation will allow Turkish police to detain those who possess the "risk of conducting a protest" from 12 to 24 hours without the demand of a prosecutor or a judge [...]. The new regulations that will be conducted jointly by the justice and interior ministries will allow the police to detain a suspect who "may hold a protest" for up to 24 hours without any court decision, while also increasing the penalties for resistance to police and damaging public property" (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

The European Progress Report 2013 for Turkey has articulated a rather "neutral" position to the "Gezi Park Protests" in Turkey throughout June 2013, framing the protests as "the emergence of vibrant, active citizenry" and a "growing and active civil society in Turkey" (EU Report on Turkey 2013, p. 11).

As a witness of these twenty days of "resistance" in Istanbul before its final brutal smash down, I suggest that the scope, expressions and ways of "coexistence" and solidarity of the Gezi Park protests along with all the other global loci of protest, have a lot more to offer for enhancing the theoretical and practical limits of democracy, going far beyond a frame of "active citizenry".

Looking at these global protests from an emancipative perspective, they appear as vast fields of "self-government of freely associated people" who come together to make themselves visible to governments, policy-makers and "experts", that take and enact decisions regarding their everyday lives despite them.

The various manifestations and expressions of these protests further have a vision of "democracy", that if looked at closely, could provide the vessel, out of which a genuine social coexistence, one, which is based on "real" equality could be shaped.

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