

Democracy Crises and Social Imaginaries – Part I

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Abstract

National State seems to be a key concept to understand modern political life and many scholars have been devoting their attention to it. On the one hand, they intend to demonstrate that we are witnessing a failure of National States to provide the needed answers to modern claims that nowadays can only be solved at international levels. On the other hand, National States seem to be the only type of social organization through which, especially in democratic regimes, people become effective in shaping the kind of world they aim to live in.

Taking into due account this problematic view, our aim is to show that both approaches are real and need to be understood in their interconnected realms. As a classic formulation puts it, there has never been a more appropriate time to affirm that we are citizens of the world, but citizenship is, at its core and in its most significant meaning, a political and national status given by some form of organized political society.

How can these different spheres of participation in political life be conciliated? How can these different claims, but with the same sources, be satisfied? How may we understand the national drives towards populism and authoritarianism in several National States with the appeal of a democracy policy with a suitable moral background that may provide a “good life”? Those are some questions we intend to address in this paper.

Keywords: Democracy, National State, Nation, Social Imaginaries

1. Is Democracy in Crisis?

Western neo-liberal democracies are often and shortly characterized by having a representative procedure of participation in the public sphere of life, determining a self-rule form of political regime, affirming the sovereignty of the people in a specific territory; an economic welfare system; political institutions that administrate and organize public life on the basis of their citizens' confidence; public security and order, or, as Ginsburg and Huq refer to «competitive elections, liberal rights of speech and association, and the rule of law» (Ginsburg and Huq, 2018: p. 1).

Indirect Democracy or Representative Democracy is an effective and recognizably just mechanism whereby political institutions regulate, administrate and attempt to resolve the conflicts that naturally emerge in everyday life in social communities. They do, through the electoral system, sustain that exceptional and in many ways incomprehensible virtue of the prevalence of the will of the majority that, most of the times ignores the profound legitimate, democratic and morally sustained claims of the minorities that also take an important role in the wealth of a democratic regime. Commonly we understand the justice of this mechanism, that is, the fair relations between power and the citizens' liberty, because they are under the rule of Law, i.e., they are established in constitutional texts that not only institute power, but also characterize the regime or model of society; ensure liberty for all in conditions of equality and aim to accomplish fraternity among people.

On the other hand, the sense of fairness and equality in Representative Democracy regimes is increased because the *Principle of Liberty* (put forward by, e.g., John Rawls) ensures equal political liberties to all citizens. However, as mentioned by Adam Przeworski: «this mechanism functions well only if the stakes are not very large, if losing an election is not a disaster, and if the defeated political forces have a reasonable chance to win in the future. When deeply ideological parties come to office seeking to remove institutional obstacles in order to solidify their political advantage and gain discretion in making policies, democracy deteriorates, or “backslides”» (Przeworski, 2019: p. 143).

So, what seems to be a well-designed and good political arrangement has its own intrinsic risks. As Whiston Churchill so clearly mentioned in 1947: «Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is

the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time....»

That could be a fact, and indeed most of the countries represented in the United Nations are democratic ones, based on the Rule of Law established in Constitutions. But the constitutional order, even in those modern democracies of the Western World, is not enough to ensure a fair and peaceful cohabitation among citizens and communities living in the same political organized territory. In fact, Constitutionalism has presented itself in several and concerning occasions in abusive forms, i.e., under the supposed democratic rule of law, warranted for the sovereignty of the people, in expressions such as “We the People”, “For the People and by the People”. In this 21st Century we have been witnessing a significant spread of examples of abusive constitutionalism across the world in order to control or perpetuate the power over the people, and that is becoming a practice common to both Right and Left elites.

For example, the constitutional revisionism in Russia and Venezuela, that allegedly legitimizes the perpetuation of the power of their leaders, may be considered as nothing but an abusive strategy that undermines the spirit and the nature of the understanding of what is and should be a Constitution in the so called *free world*. Nonetheless, those countries remain, at least formally, despite the conditions on which those changes were built, as National States characterized by the rule of law.

Apart from Russia and Venezuela, we could indicate other countries where this «Constitutional retrogression» (Ginsburg and Huq, 2018: pp. 117-118) is present: in Hungary, Poland, Singapore, Thailand, Ukraine, recent events have shown that those regimes could still be considered as constitutional regimes, but they are hardly democratic. In this context, the same authors have defined what they consider to be a «simultaneous decay in three institutional predicates of democracy: the quality of elections, speech and associational rights, and the rule of law» (...) [and] five specific mechanisms by which constitutional retrogression unfolds. These are: (i) constitutional amendment; (ii) the elimination of institutional checks; (iii) the centralization and politicization of executive power; (iv) the contraction or distortion of a shared public sphere; and (v) the elimination of political competition.» (*Ibidem*)¹.

¹ For this subject, see also: PHARR, Susan J., and Robert D. PUTNAM (eds.), *Disaffected democracies. What's troubling the trilateral countries?*, Princeton., Princeton University Press, 2000 or PLATTNER, Marc F. «Liberal democracy's fading allure», in *Journal of Democracy* 28 (4) pp. 5–14, 2017.

Departing from this enumeration, we may identify other different problems and issues that can be addressed when analysing the quality of our democracies and the rule of law, but they are much subtler. In the United States of America (USA), for example, we may identify a constitutional ideology as a form of affirmation of the oldest, freest, most successful and distinctive modern democracy, but which also enables a worldwide projection of economic and military power over other National States confining their liberties and sovereignty. At the same time, the exceptionalism of their representative arrangements in presidential elections reveals that the support of the economic lobbies is far more important than the support of the citizens by attending to their claims. At the same time, the well-known propaganda strategy of identifying a common enemy – internal Political Institutions or the Media – is a means of undertaking restrictive actions against the liberty of the people –the unjustified and questionable legal federal interference in the policies of particular states are a mere example of it. It goes to the point of questioning the legitimacy of elections that are or were ongoing (Bush / Al Gore; Trump / Biden).

Returning to a democratic neo liberal context, one of the most important aspects that keeps people living together without major conflicts among themselves is economic security, that is, the means to pursue their interests and to flourish by achieving their personal or communal objectives and living a meaning and fruitful live. That implies having the opportunities to climb up the social ladder; to access better jobs and functions available in society and to benefit from a fair social welfare system. The latter, is presented as one of the most important conquests in the outcome of World War II, as well as higher degrees of industrialization and consequent economic development, that specially contributed to the pacification not only between societies, but also among citizens.

Combined, equality in political liberty and economic security are the foremost characteristics that endorse the importance of National States in the shaping of modern societies in the second half of the 20th Century, yet that hasn't prevented the rise of other kinds of problems and challenges to the spread of democracy worldwide. Not only at a political level but specially on moral grounds since a State is not only a political entity, but also a National one.

Let us first address the political issues that have slowly undermined the cohesion of National States. In this regard, in spite of the differences concerning other moments in history, modern National States have evolved into a particular form of party system,

administrated and controlled by two major parties, more or less similar to each other, typically referred to as being representatives of a left or a right wing, fighting for power in favour of their own interests and not always in favour of who they represent. This party system, composed normally by two or, in some but fewer cases, three parties, has been engaged in a rotative but permanent exercise of power, that has been showed to be more and more distant from those who elected them, making occasional arrangements and “concessions” to respond to the claims of the voters.

That is, the party system has become an arrangement for some elites and by the elites. The justification for it relies on the fact that, as societies become more complex and people’s relations and interactions increase and become more intricaded, so does the bureaucratic level of administration, as well as the level of expertise to deal with such a complex way of political organization. As a result, professional politicians are required to do the job and those politicians, from top to bottom, do not recognize the ability of an average citizen to address such complicated social matters. The same kind of political bureaucratic complexity and the level of expertise that are inherent to the effective efficacy of a modern State clearly justify the fact that governments in our days are composed by professional politicians that are, in the large majority of the well-known cases, lawyers, judges, economists, entrepreneurs, and other highly skilled advisors because they seem to be the only type of people that can lead the modern life. At the same time, from bottom to top, common citizens acknowledge their inability and lack of expertise to engage in political parties or even comprehend and contribute to solve the problems that they have to deal with in their ordinary lives.

Of course, there are and there will always be means to deal with this kind of *Constitutional retrogression*. Unfortunately, the answers that have been put forward are, from top to bottom, forms of authoritarianism and, from bottom to top, as Kriesi identifies, populism: «While their “host” ideology connects these parties to the fundamental structural conflicts in society, the “thin” populist “ideology” connects them to the more narrow political sphere and to the political discontent of their constituencies. More specifically, the populist “ideology” refers to the tension between “the elites” and “the people.” This “ideology” puts the emphasis on the fundamental role of “the people” in politics, claims that “the people” have been betrayed by “the elites” in charge who are abusing their position of power, and demands that the sovereignty of the people be restored.» (Kriesi, 2020: p. 248).

Much has been said about the crises of democracy, particularly about the increasing forms of political authoritarianism and populism. But many scholars have also dealt with those kinds of problems and pointed out other causes and some solutions. Although the solutions are often questionable, the causes they endorse may be too exhaustive to summarise in the scope of this article, but for our intents, the political problems with Democratic Representation here presented are at the core of the weakness of the modern party system and at the same time of the weakness of the State as the sovereign entity that can provide its citizens with a meaning and fruitful life. The growing abstention in election procedures is not just a sign of our days sustaining that people do not care about who governs them anymore. In Western neo-liberal societies, it is, I suppose, a much deeper sign, a sign that shows or anticipates the end of ideologies. People no longer care whether left or right wings control political institutions. They seem to care only about their economic conditions: their wages; whether they will be able to have a comfortable house; a good car; education for their children, the opportunity to live in a safe neighbourhood, and so on, as if there was some kind of agreement or a trade between the amount of taxes that are to be paid and the goods that are to be received. But that, I think, is only the superficial outlook of a misguided or distorted interpretation. There is a spread sense that the State is too big to solve small problems and too small to solve big problems and the majority of problems that people face in their everyday lives are too small to deserve attention and the intervention of a centralized government. As such, we are starting to witness a growing sentiment of frustration, especially because participation in political life, to be involved in determining the shape of our societies, is an important aspect of affirming our own personal identity.

2. National States and Globalization

When properly interpreted, the concept of National States must be addressed at an instrumental level and not in its essence or as an end in itself.

That seems to be the confusion that relies on the current cosmopolitanism theories. Those theories seem to defend that we are facing the end of an era; the end of the national states *tout court*, even those that are more recent and which have emerged from those terrible conflicts, in the sense that I have mentioned above, after World War II, after the decolonization process and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The

Nation States (even the old nations) are now facing the danger of a new form of indeterminacy caused by modern globalization. The confusion that is important to underline is that what is in question with globalization is not the end of National States, nor their political institutions, what may be at stake is the identification of the feeling of belonging to a nation and the responses that national states are giving to the claims posed by that sentiment. I shall return later to this question because it poses another question that should be addressed first.

Many consider that the supposed indeterminacy of modern national states is a result of globalization movements and that is a symptom of the decay or *backsliding* of Democracies, but it is far more important to recognize that what is becoming very problematic in the 21st Century is not Democracy in itself. Globalization, national states and democracy go along together.

As the study of Claassen (2020) shows, considering «3765 collected national opinions about democracy, obtained from 1390 nationally representative public opinion surveys in 150 countries, citizens' support for democracy is robustly linked to the stability of democracy, once it has been established» (*Apud* Przeworski, 2019: pp. 241-242). That should give us an important insight about the importance given to self-determination acquired by self-rule in a democratic political background of a national state. So, we have to realize that the questions posed by globalization movements are not threats to the existence of national states. We must find the answers to those questions on a different level of analysis.

In fact, Democracies are grounded on a core of values and practices that allows the manifestations of different identities. If those values, attitudes and practices have a democratic structure that involves respect, recognition and liberty of expression of differences, living in a globalized world doesn't present a danger to democracy in itself, nor even a crisis, on the contrary, it will be, I suppose, although it may be considered paradoxical, the fundamental key to affirm its value. That is precisely what is attested in the of *The Global State of Democracy 2019* survey of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): «More than half of the countries in the world (62 per cent, or 97 countries) covered by the GSoD Indices are now democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in 1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world's population now lives in some form of democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975. The number of democracies continues to rise, from 90 in 2008 to 97 in 2018. This increase has occurred despite a slowdown in global democratic expansion since the mid-1990s.

The large majority (81 per cent) of the world's 97 democracies have proven democratically resilient, having maintained their democratic status uninterrupted since 1975 or when they transitioned to democracy» (IDEA, 2019).

Of course, there are problems which need to be addressed: the increase of the interdependence and economic competition at an international level, the increasing growth of migrants movements from very different cultural backgrounds to those of the communities of destination and their claims for political integration in the societies that “accept” them, as well as worldwide terrorism and corruption, which raise questions of security at a global scale. The same with global problems posed by climate changes that are endorsing new and huge challenges to national states but at the same time, those problematic issues also demand that we inevitably address and adopt measures of fruitful international political cooperation and integration, even among those national states with similar historical and political traditions that constitute what we call the Occidental World.

The solutions for these problems have often been linked with the necessity of allowing the flourishing and the development of the proper sense of a national state, of a shared cultural heritage, a common language, essentially bringing together the best of both worlds, hoping that the mechanisms of internationalization (globalism) will achieve a peaceful coexistence of the differences between peoples. On the contrary, the quick expansion of trade at a global level, the development of communication technologies and the generalized access to them, as well as the creation of transnational institutions with their own regulatory powers over the markets have reduced the capacity of national states to regulate their own domestic economies and that, as the mentioned example of EU shows, constraints the health of constitutional democracies.

International institutions endow themselves with self-rule mechanisms to protect their trade agreements and the way the markets should function at a global level, and those powers are not directly controlled nor is their action subject to a direct political and democratic accountability of national states and, because of that, the self-determination of these states becomes increasingly compromised. So, we can reaffirm, in a most prominent mode, that in terms of globalism, the states are far too big to endorse the claims of their citizens, and too small to face global challenges.

It is natural that the national states, from an instrumental point of view, become even more weakened at national and international levels since they have lost the political control of the decision-making process in major spheres of public life.

With globalism and globalization there is a skewing or fading of the traditional sources of legitimacy of the existence of national states because globalism and in particular globalization implies a loss of autonomy in implementing national policies and a transference on the process of decision-making from national to international institutions.

The recent threats of populism, nationalism, protectionism, and regionalism are, in fact, affecting the compromises and agreements between national states and global political institutions. They are also putting pressure under the operative power and political capability of international governmental institutions. The appeal for change is being done by political actors such as national states, international Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and even by individual citizens. In common, populist movements carry a huge sentiment of uncertainty regarding what the future could bring at both national and global levels. However, it is curious to attest that the populist movements also denote that nationalism, identity politics and other different forms of protectionism, not only economic, have presented themselves as means of preservation of historical cultures, of nations and also of a state where they coincide. Populism, beyond its generalized pejorative meaning, could be reoriented to an affirmation of national democracies in a form of restriction of power engaged in particular interests, factions and elites, and also protect individual rights, improve the quality of the democratic deliberative process.

Democratic governments, endorsing social or liberal ideals, must recognize that some of the populist claims are legitimate claims, for instance, not all the appeals to preserve one's identity are necessarily xenophobic.

The opposition that must be undertaken is not against the capitalist character of globalization, since globalization coexists well with democratic regimes, in fact, it seems to flourish better in democratic regimes, but the excesses that were committed regarding its deregulation have led to the diminished importance of citizen participation in political life and, as a consequence, to the diminished trust in their national states. Nevertheless, we are witnessing the manifestation of a desire to ensure some kind of moral regeneration at a national level, which is what opposes the citizens to their economic, political, and even cultural elites.

3. The *Social Imaginary* of a Nation

As I have mentioned before, in the present context, States are not just States, they are National States as well. And that poses another type of questions and problems that are fundamentally as important as the present claims of citizens to their national political institutions. Indeed, as Charles Taylor clearly sustains and concludes, in an article titled *Why do Nations have to become States?*, «In the best of all worlds, nations would not have to become states. It should be one of their options (self-determination) but not the top option. A higher aspiration is supranational unity, following the best of the modern political tradition.» (Taylor, 1993: p. 58). It is not surprising that the Canadian philosopher, already in 1993, almost 30 years ago, anticipated what seems to be, in our days, an outcome of the so-called crises of democracy. As mentioned before, the current indeterminacy, in some cases, of Representative Democracy, the *Constitutional retrogression*, the elitism in politics, the inept party system, the menaces of authoritarianism and populism, in their mutual and possible interconnectedness, but, above all, some kind of sentiment of depoliticization of ordinary life felt by ordinary citizens regarding their National States. In fact, there is a spread sense that the decisions that really matter, those decisions that have concrete economic and social impacts in our lives are not made in response to our personal or community claims. Those decisions and the adopted policies, although made and implanted on a national level, mostly depend or result from international conjunctures. The European Union (EU) is a perfect example.

In order to become part of the EU, National States had to alienate their sovereignty in various domains in the exercise of power. At economic level, which was the first purpose of the alliance, through the adoption of the same currency, the participation on the EU budget – “I want my money back”, said Margaret Thatcher in 1979, but now it seems that Boris Johnson doesn’t want to give it back – the control of the European Central Bank over the national finances of the member states. At a political level there are democratic requirements that countries have to achieve to become part of the EU and that is what explains the greater enlargement after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the stabilization of democracy in the “new” republics. But there are also other political implications such as the obligation to adopt common political policies, namely investments in agriculture, industrialization, infra-structures, and so on. In this context, a European farmer, fisherman or factory worker, pays more attention to the economic support of the EU than they do to their national governments.

Additionally, the EU Law imposes itself, in many aspects, to the national juridical systems of the member states. Of course, all these matters have a juridical and legal support and that is another example of loss of sovereignty, but all of it is done in the name of the affirmation of a European Citizenship with free movement of goods and services and abolished borders under the Schengen Agreement.

However, the most curious aspect is the fact that the project of creation of a European Constitution was not approved by the majority of the member states and one of its highly problematic issues was the attempt to affirm the Christian and Jewish heritage of the European people. Besides everything that could bring Europeans together, they affirm that their identities were not and could not be put in question. The EU is and will still be an alliance of nations – Walloons and Flemish identify themselves first as Belgians and only indirectly as Europeans, the same with Catalans and Basques in Spain, in spite of their attempts to achieve independency.

We must therefore ask: what is a Nation? What characteristics must we take into consideration to identify a political organized society as a Nation? Is it sufficient to know what a Nation is if we call a political organization of a group of people living in a demarcated territory a National State? Are there other characteristics, particularly at a moral level, that could better identify what a Nation is?

Let us start with a quote from Ernest Renan: «A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which, properly speaking, are really one and the same constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received. (...) A great aggregation of men, in sane mind and warm heart, created a moral conscience that calls itself a nation» (Renan, 1882: pp.10-11).

From Ernest Renan's quote and in several examples rooted on Hegel's *Zeitgeist*, we may identify a current of thought that has crossed the entire 20th Century. That current of thought affirms, broadly speaking, that a Nation is or reflects a sense of common belonging for a group of people grounded in a common history, traditions, systems of beliefs, a cultural heritage, a common language, a sense of shared genetic uniqueness and, likewise, a collective patrimony that is not only spiritual, but also materialized in institutional political structures. In a nation people find their own concept of a meaningful life that is worth pursuing; they find a common "world vision" and a moral horizon that justifies their choices and their claims. In a word, in a Nation people find their Identity.

An Identity that is worth fighting for, dying for, and that is what has led to extreme forms of nationalisms and the well-known terrible conflicts that our previous generation has experienced.

Those conflicts were brought about, first, in the name of the right to self-determination of different nations, but, secondly, they were based on a project to spread that identity across the world because it was thought that it was not only the best, but also the only worth being lived. So, as self-determination becomes the right of a nation to exist, the self-rule of the people becomes the necessary condition for them to affirm their personal identities and that is only fruitful if it is combined with the affirmation of a national identity. That is the means through which the *spiritual principle* is combined with political institutional frameworks to form a nation.

Put this way, we may consider the concept of Nation without political attributes; more currently it has been pointed out that if we consider the immaterial or spiritual characteristics of what a nation is, then we may find different nations living together under the same political structure, that is, in one same State and, last but not least, there aren't many nations in the world that manifest a cohesion and identification between their political institutions and their common cultural or spiritual heritage. Nevertheless, people seem to support their nation as equivalently as they advocate the right to manifest their personal identities. Instead of what is commonly supposed, and taken the evidence from history, they take the former as a means to accomplish the latter.

The concept of nation is frequently associated to a political organized society, to a national state that endorses social cohesion between its citizens, but that it is not necessarily the only way to understand it. In fact, social cohesion in a national state could be achieved by the regulation of social life through law, by establishing common rights and duties, through the satisfaction of the needs of its members, but those aren't the only mechanisms or even the core mechanisms that create the bounds and the senses of belonging that, crucially, characterize what a nation is.

A nation does not define itself only by its one political or normative dimension. Conceived in its full amplitude, the concept of nation involves a particular moral conception derived from a common tradition, a history and a system of beliefs that projects in a future shared horizon. It is as ongoing process formed by subjective actions and interactions among individuals that give birth to a collective identity recognizable and understood by its members who act in conformity with that sense of belonging. Obviously, this is not a peaceful process nor even can be described objectively or factually

by sociological measurable or statistic methods. It is a process of identification and formation of a collective identity that occurs, most of the times, but not necessarily, in a delimited territory, where the public actions and interactions are political organized, involving the coexistence of different subjectivities that carries, inevitably, multiple ambiguities, to the point of considering the possibility of existence different social identities in a same nation. Putting aside the economic or demographic systems or methods of classification, what may coexist in a nation is different personal identities or group identities living together in the same social order. But that, seems to be a skewed question.

It is important to take in consideration that a personal identity reveals an active and creative agent that, in its intentional actions, appropriates and assumes cultural and social established values and norms, but also recreates values and disclose new meanings to social existence. On the other hand, a collective identity, in the scope of what we may define as nation, is composed by members of different communities of shared values, different cultural backgrounds but, at the same time, members who recognize a similar sense of belonging, the same sense of citizenship. That does not mean that there aren't conflictual claims and demands in the process of manifestation and affirmation of a personal identity and the assumption of a collective identity. It is precisely the outcome of the dialectic between the need of recognition of a personal identity and the opportunities that political societies provides for the manifestation and affirmation of that identity that will form the specific spirit of a nation, different from others. It is important to underline that those conflicts or that dialectic it's not structured only by the normative dimension of the State; it is more than that, it is regulated by informal mechanisms of acculturation inherent to any contextualized and multidimensional social life (See Greenfeld, 1993).

The true meaning of a nation resides on the existence of a cultural community with shared founding myths, symbolic meanings and values but, at the same time, with the perspective of a common and meaningful future horizon of collective realization that justifies social and political arrangements. Therefore, the identity of a nation is a dialogical, relational one. An identity composed by different and subjective interpretations of what unites its members, and, because of it, it is a shared mental realm, more symbolic than normative, more imaginary than statutory. It provides the context through which a specific political organization may exist and the comprehension and justification of its institutions.

Democracy Crises and Social Imaginaries – Part II

National Imaginary

Cornelius Castoriadis identifies the social imaginary has not being composed by conceptions about what a society is but by what gives sense to the symbols, the goods, the institutions, i.e., what configures the *ethos* of a group. In these terms, the best way to define a society is a set of shared and unifying conceptions that provide a significant content and are framed in symbolic structures. Castoriadis refers as examples of social imaginaries the Old Testament to the Jews or the philosophical and democratic conceptions of the Ancient Greece. That is to say that a particular society can only be understood considering his binder and fundamental imaginaries, situated in a particular space and time context. This imaginary provides a horizon of meaning that allows to determine what a society is in ontological terms, as he refers: «The institution of society is in each case the institution of a magma of social imaginary significations, which we can and must call a world of significations» (Castoriadis 1987, p. 359). It is this set of significant and meaning, supplied by the social imaginary, that provides a specific vision of the world and that creates the proper “world” of a society, i.e., that institutes a society and allows it to be distinguished from others.

Another author, Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1983) emphasizes the constructive aspect of the imaginative creations but goes beyond the specificity of meaning and signification underling several social imaginaries as a differentiator source between societies. To Anderson, the same social imaginary does not only have a differentiator and identity aspect of a particular society. To Anderson, the social imaginary is not the only identity differentiator of a particular society; it is more than that – it is transversal to different groups or societies, and it is formed and developed in history in its civilizational terms. An example of this conception is the social imaginary underlying to the concept of nation. The modern concept of nation has been instituted in many societies, since the end of the 18th century, because people were called to participate and to take part in similar kinds of social practices, forming, due to public participation, imagined communities that helped to fixate new identities or new nations. If we understand nation as «an imagined political

community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign» (Anderson, 1983: 15), we can understand that the social imaginary is not specific of a group or a society, mas but it is shared by different societies.

In those terms, although it is a fact that the forms of his institutionalization diverge from group to group, from society to society, it is always the same imaginary that constitutes the idea of a nation. What it is determinant to understand what a nation or a society may be are not the political ideologies, those can be easily identified, but what is fundamentally are the cultural models which are shared in a similar way and the common implicit schemes of the world interpretation.

On the other hand, Charles Taylor emphasizes that a modern social imaginary is not the way society imagines, but the way we imagine society. This is a very significant turn in the mainstream theory on social imaginaries. It is no longer a social or sociological theory, an external observation that allows a characterization and an empirical definition of what a society may be, as in Castoriadis; nor if the same social imaginary is extensible or common to different groups or societies as the underlined imaginary of the notion that Andersen uses as an example.

Departing from Andersen's thesis, although whit an emphasis on phenomenological analysis, Taylor reaffirms the importance of cultural models that enlighten a vision of the world and that are sources of identity to those who share them, but he stresses that the social imaginaries are now modern, i.e., fit not only in groups or nations, but also, in its own way, in the individual.

Paradoxically, the atomism that characterizes modern societies does not diminish the strength of the idea of what society or nation is. To Taylor, what we see in modern times is a change in the comprehensible forms of societies as being composed by sacred hierarchies and timeless laws. In modernity, what is underlying to the moral order of societies is a relation between individuals that aim to, fundamentally, satisfy their private goods and consider their functional differences at an instrumental and contingent level, because their members are ultimately equal among themselves. Even in instances where the personal identity of the members of a society are marginalized and ostracized, they still considered themselves as equal and free individuals in legal, moral, and political terms.

From here, the consideration about what may be a social imaginary assumes phenomenological contours or begins to be understood, by Taylor, phenomenologically, in the sense of what is, we may say, designate as *background*. Quoting Taylor: «I want to

speak of social imaginary here, rather than social theory, because there are important – and multiple – differences between the two. I speak of imaginary because I’m talking about the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends. But it is also the case that theory is usually the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (...) Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. This understanding is both factual and ‘normative’; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice. (...) The relation between practices and the background understanding behind them is therefore not one-sided. If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that the practice largely carries the understanding. (...) What I’m calling the social imaginary extends beyond the immediate background understanding that makes sense of our particular practices (...) this understanding necessarily supposes a wider grasp of our whole predicament, how we stand in relationship to one another, how we got where we are, how we relate to other groups. . . It is in fact that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world become evident». (Taylor, 2002: pp. 106-107).

The context of the social imaginary provides the sense of conjoint belonging, the sense to the way of being in the world in social terms, the sense that justifies the expectations that we can have towards us and the others, i.e., gives the special-time context in which we realize, judge and act in the world; provides the parameters in which people can imagine their social existence.

This comprehensive context is, at the same time, descriptive and normative, because it provides the ethical patterns that give the adequate way of being in the world.

For Taylor, social imaginaries are not theories nor ideologies, but implicit contexts that map the social space and normalize a particular temporal sense where it grounds. At the same time, is a shared sense about legitimizing certain social expressions

and practices. He argues that there are three main scope of social practices that gain their sense and are legitimized from the established horizon shared by the social modern imaginary: I) the popular sovereignty and the political autonomy that points to the primacy of society over politics and the importance of a common action; II) the market economy, that privileges the private sector, neglecting the meaning of a collective action; III) the public sphere of action that is external to the politics but internal to society and that demands the accountability of politics towards society. Significance in Taylor, comparing with other mentioned authors, is that the modern social imaginary has not been established from the 18th century in opposition or against other social imaginaries, being the Greek, Jewish or Christian, with their philosophical, political and religious ideas, being other social imaginaries that coexist with this Occidental social imaginary that we've talking about. The Occidental modern social imaginary constitutes itself as the relation and the encounter with other social imaginaries, i.e., constitutes an intercultural, intercivilizational form, exploring how its meaning and its institutions of power that reflect them are generated, and, at the same time, being a motor of transformation and evolution through acculturation.

It is in this sense that the notion of national community, the one of a nation, demands a comprehension of the specificity of a cultural particularity and not merely an assertion of political ideologies that may characterize them. In fact, modern ideologies, as liberalism, conservatism or socialism are no longer identity references of a nation; on the other hand, a collective community compromised with certain values and ideals that articulate the same social imaginary in factual political programs seems the most adequate criterion to define, nowadays, what a nation is.

Global Imaginary

While we experience this changing in the political ideology to the social imaginary as a proper way to express and understand what a nation is, the meaning of interdependency and the need of a relation and the encounter between cultures and civilizations, which is inherent to that change and to the evolution of the social imaginary, is, at the same time, the reason of its weakening and fragmentation. The thesis is: in the same way the globalized world has been affirming a global imaginary, the social imaginary of a nation is degrading, what, necessarily, results in a diffuse understanding

an in a disfigured affirmation of the personal and collective identities. The national feeling, of belonging to a nation, is progressively defied by a global feeling, the one of belonging to the world.

Of course this global imaginary is only possible because it has the means to constitute and to affirm itself, and that affirmation goes through out the action of the individuals that, for the reasons already alluded in the first part – distorted representativity, abusive constitutionalism, partisanship, elitism, populism and negative nationalisms – but in particular by economic globalization and by the affirmation of a public opinion through media networks that are spread worldwide, forge new identities or identify other sources of identity that also give meaning to their being and being in the world, giving rise to new cosmopolitan ideologies, be they right-wing or left-wing. However, this global imaginary is incomplete and dysfunctional since it lacks its moral foundations and the social and political institutions to constitute itself as a global social imaginary. As already stated, globalization is not accompanied by globalism. Even the United Nations, which could become an effective means of promoting this globalism, is not only often disunited, but it is intended to be and cannot aim to another thing than be a unity of nations.

Although incomplete and dysfunctional, this global or planetary imaginary is a cosmopolitan imaginary that is created around a social and political sense shared by individuals with significant different backgrounds and affirmed in opposition to the social and political meanings and comprehensions created nationally and collectively shared. It emerges through a distorted notion of cultural unity promoted by globalization and depoliticization of principles of social and political organization that are now considered neutral, natural, and universal, without the need for institutional support. To this is allied an ideal of authenticity based on an individualized and atomized and radicalized notion of autonomy and self-realization, which has as consequence the affirmation of an equality in the dignity of choices and in its inherent moral relativism.

The three spheres of social practice to which Taylor refers (see above), for the reasons alluded, seem to divide ideologies no longer in their classical terms of liberalism, conservatism and socialism, but from the postures that individuals adopt in the face of market globalism and the globalism of justice. As Manfred B. Steger states ««The outcome was a new political belief system centered on five central ideological claims that translated the global imaginary in concrete political programs and agendas: 1) globalisation is about the liberalization and global integration of markets; 2) globalisation

is inevitable and irreversible; 3) nobody is in charge of globalisation; 4) globalisation benefits everyone; 5) globalisation furthers the spread of democracy in the world», (Steger: 2009, p. 20).

In terms of the imaginary globalism attempted by economic and political elites, it points out its positive aspects such as the general increase in the standard of living, the reduction of poverty on a global scale and technological progress. However, we can also identify its dangers: accentuated social inequalities and marginalization of those who are left behind; the proliferation of conflicting forms of self-interest satisfaction; the accentuation of individualism and the destruction of the bonds of solidarity between individuals and peoples; environmental destruction and, above all, the weakening of democratic forms of participation in the construction of the world in which one lives and wants to live. The implications of this imaginary, as of all its imaginings, are moral, social, and political and have been accentuating what has been identified as *democracy decay* or *backsliding*.

What seems to be the common and fundamental aspect that accentuates the bad feeling of this modernity and the solution to the negative diagnosis presented in the first part of this article is the weakening or even the absence of effective forms of political participation that can respond to the needs that citizens present and those does not concern only to the satisfaction of material needs that allow them to live a comfortable life, in safety and health, but above all is concerns to forms of participation that allow them to flourish and realize themselves as members of a communitarian identity, with a common heritage, history, language, system of beliefs and common practices that give meaning to their personal identities and provide the meaningful horizon that justifies their present choices.

Although it is undeniable that, in the world in which we live, it is necessary to reformulate personal and collective identities, since this is an inherent dynamism in the very formation of any identity, it is also undeniable that if this reformulation is not achieved by and through forms of participation in political life, it will remain undetermined. Therefore, is that it is necessary to correct what we already call regression in representativeness.

The concept of the Liberal Democratic Rule of Law that underlies the existence and independence of nations, because it ensures self-government based on constitutionalism, i.e., the *Rule of Law*, and self-determination, is based on the freedom and political equality of all citizens, and that freedom and equality are assured by the right

of representation, i.e., the right to elect their representatives to positions and functions in the exercise of sovereignty, as well as the right to be elected and to represent their voters in the exercise of those positions and functions. This means that representativity is thus a necessary and indispensable mechanism in the realization of the social imaginary of each person, group, or nation, since it is in this way that political participation becomes effective in the construction and affirmation of personal or collective identity.

In this context, the symptoms that have been identified as sources of democratic decay, such as, in a national level, the growth of populist and nationalist claims, in their most negative aspects, which often lead to a constitutional revisionism to abusive forms in democratic terms, as well as isolationism, protectionism not only economic but also social, with the opposition to migratory movements and the refusal to receive refugees, the weakening of social cohesion and the affirmation of the superiority of the majority over minority groups within the same nation, especially those minorities that differ in ethnic and cultural terms, are motivated and exponentiated by a deficient and inadequate mechanism of political representation. On the other hand, if we consider the issue at a global level, through which this global imaginary is fed by different modes of globalization, we see that the legitimate claims of individuals and peoples, especially those excluded from this process or those who advocate global ideas that are beyond economic factors, such as environmental ideals, simply have no way of being represented, often limiting themselves to the manifestation of their claims in the global media, thus seeking that their ambitions be virtually shared, becoming "viral" and thus able to exercise some pressure on the elites, especially the economic ones. So, we return to the form of participation that is legitimate, legitimized and that can be effective, the national representativeness. It is only in this way, from the bottom up, that the needs and demands of people and communities can be met and that their representatives can respond to them both internally - nationally - and externally, diplomatically - globally.

As Kriesi puts it: «Arguably it is the consequence of a crisis of representation, i.e., of an inadequate representation of the citizens' demands in the political system. The crisis of representation, in turn, may result from two sets of factors. On the one hand, it is the result of a lack of responsiveness of the political system, most importantly of the party system, to new demands of the citizens. The citizens' demands are linked to broad societal conflicts. In Western Europe, these conflicts were traditionally based on religion and class, and to some extent also on regional differences. More recently, however, we have seen the rise of new structural conflicts linked to processes of globalization, which can be

broadly understood as the opening up of national borders in varying ways. Thus, the increasing international economic competition, the increasing influx of migrants from ever more distant and culturally more different shores, and the increasing political integration in the European Union have created conflicts between “winners” and “losers” of globalization, i.e., between people whose life chances were traditionally protected by national boundaries and who perceive the weakening of these boundaries as a threat to their social status and their social security, and people whose life chances are enhanced by the opening up of national borders». (Kriesi: 2020, p. 10)

As we have been saying, the representativity has been distorted and weakened. The feeling that who is elected represents who elect has been exponentially weakened. It is a diagnosis that has been made by several academics, in particular Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka who have been drawing attention to the need to conceive new models of citizenship, new models of participation in political life, new mechanisms of representativeness.

Preserving social imaginaries: Rethinking representativeness

The rationalism of the Enlightenment that presided the elaboration of the theory of the separation of powers and government by the *Rule of Law*, were at the basis of the institution of parliamentarianism and representativity that motivated the spread of the scope of civil rights. Especially since World War II, those ideas spread throughout the world and originated the liberal democracies that we know today, where sovereignty resides in the people and the legitimacy of the exercise of power derives from its representativeness materialized by electoral mechanisms. In the name of the equality of all citizens, the same rationalism produced a quantitative criterion for determining the legitimacy of the exercise of power. Thus, all votes count the same, and even in indirect electoral systems, it is the quantitative criterion that determines representativeness and, consequently, the legitimacy in the exercise of power by expressing the will of the majority.

The lack of political representation of local communities, or at least their sense of ineffectiveness of the representative system to respond to their needs, promotes their alienation from national political systems and weakens it. It is a vicious circle, i.e., the political system does not adequately represent the political communities, and these, if not

represented, weaken the political system and its ability to respond to the needs of local communities. In this way, what is fundamental in any democratic regime has become increasingly faded, i.e., a strong bond between political institutions and the needs and aspirations of citizens.

Break this vicious circle means strengthening democracy and that is possible with new forms of representation, especially in the name of local communities.

We believe that it is this mechanism that must now be questioned and rethought in order to reverse what has been called democratic decay, whether these are motivated or accentuated by the internal dynamisms inevitably inherent in nations that are increasingly composed of multiple minorities, scattered by divergent values and interests, are motivated and accentuated by the global dynamism of interaction and interdependence, especially at economic level, of the different nations in the concert of the world. One way or another, we believe that the health and well-being of modern democracies will come from the capacity to implement new mechanisms of representativeness that are based, not on an egalitarian quantitative criterion, but on an equitable qualitative criterion. This is what the aforementioned new modes of political participation, the new models of citizenship that have been proposed, affirm, i.e., the need for a reconstruction of the mechanisms of representativeness, in the various layers of representation, from local, to national and global, which will have to be concretized from the bottom to top as a proper way to strengthen the feeling that an election really has political consequences.

This bottom-up movement is not, of course, carried out by atomized individuals, since they do not have the capacity to articulate what is collectively established, that is, the moral sources that make up the collective identity and that present themselves as a significant horizon for the construction of a personal identity. It will have to be the local communities, in the first place, to forge a political project that meets their collective needs and aspirations that are discovered and made explicit through dialogue. From here, according to Charles Taylor, we can identify the conditions that could make it possible: «We distinguish four different building blocks of this change:

(I) It involves an existential shift in stance: From a sense that we as a community are the victims of powerful forces beyond our control, such as the “globalizing elites” or “distant technocrats,” or the disloyal competition of foreigners, we come to see ourselves as capable of taking initiative, of doing something to alter our own predicament. Therefore, the emergence of a deliberative community, of the “political” in

Arendt's sense, generates an empowering consciousness of collective agency and possibility among the local community.

(II) At the same time, the fact that we have to join forces and work with others, from different organizations, confessions, outlooks, and even political convictions, makes us listen to each other: deliberative communities build new inclusive solidarities and trust among the participants.

(III) We also open up new alleys to creativity. a realignment of both knowledge and motivation, both a clearer vision and shared power around this vision.

(IV) our standing as a group has significant changed. Our interpretation and understanding of the situation, our interests and goals, and even our motivations, values, and vision have become aligned. Once a responsive connection to the political system has been successfully established, we feel empowered because we are empowered. Because of its potential for the alignment of goals, knowledge, and motivation, the rebuilding of local deliberative communities is both a mode of organization and a means of political mobilization». (Taylor, 2020: pp. 22-25 - adapted)

A democratic renewal implies: «(1) to define new and potentially fruitful policies or programs to meet important needs of citizens, and (2) to create commitment, cohesion, or solidarity around these policies». (Taylor, 2020: p. 85) and, we add, forms of effective political representation.

Empirical data show that this is not the affirmation of an inconsequent idealism. It is a proposal based on a new way of designing democracy in a context in which political institutions and their party system and representative mechanisms has proved to be ineffective in meeting citizens needs. What is at stake is the bond of justice that unites people around a common good that is greater than the sum of private interests, but at both the national and global levels. It is necessary to continue to respect the need to satisfy private goods in a way that is harmonized with the common good. This implies a concerted action among political parties, nonpartisan social movements, and a solid local community, with a strong civic sense, and organized around needs and aspirations consistent with the preservation of collective identity, with its social imaginary.

If the representativeness mechanism must be reformulated to respond a claim from bottom to top by the qualified participation of the members of local communities, by the formal or informal movements, more or less organized and institutionalized in what is classical named as civil society, that claim only becomes effective and successful by the alteration of the mechanisms of representativeness inscribes in constitutional texts.

As a mean to combat the announced democratic decline that we are experience and, at the same time, as a mean to strength the link that bides representants and the represented, it is also necessary that the same claim find acknowledgement among the political institutions, from top to the bottom, has a necessary condition for change de mechanism of representativeness in constitutional texts.

As mention before, representativeness must be grounded in a qualitative criterion that allows a more effective political expression of local communities whit shared interests that, regardless of the number of its members, present distinct specificities and particularities between each others. Those particularities could be justified by the possibilities that a specific territory and environment provides for its flourishing, or also, for example, due to the industrialization and mechanization of labour that dissolves professional communities e their identities (see, for instance, the local communities of fisherman, lumberjacks, small farmers, that ae eroded not only professionally but as an inevitable consequence in its identitary component), and even also, most preeminent of all, linguistic, cultural and religious minoritarian communities.

Maybe we may conceive a quote system in the election of representants of those communities; a qualified vote that could have a significant greater numerical expression, although in equitable terms, that represents one community and not only the some of the votes of the individuals that composed them. Maybe it could be reasonably the creation of an indirect representation based on “qualified electors” of different local communities that could nominate the legislative and the executive powers. It seems that it could be a more adequate and effective way to address the different claims of different communities that, being in majority or in minority, remains legitim claims.

If something like this does not happened the feeling of belonging to a nation and a political community becomes even more flattened.

New mechanisms of representation should require also new forms of accountability for the representants. Responsibility and transparency are the effective means to endow the system whit trust. Trust is, was and it always will be the key factor that provides cohesion to the relation among electors and elected and when that sentiment of trust is questioned or is undermine by the bureaucratic structures of the political system, the immediate consequence is the depoliticization or lack of political participation of de citizens. It needed to endow the system of representativeness whit a juridical framework that reinforces the accountability of politicians in office, punishing them when by their action they deliberate misrepresent the manifested will and the claims of their electors.

What we are suggesting is not only an implicit contract, but an explicit contract where it became possible not only swear to obey the Constitution but also to obey to the mandate that is attribute to them by the electors. This kind of accountability demands a response, a demonstration of what is done, how it was done e why it was done what is done in the name of that mandate. That requires transparency; requires regular communication between representants and the represented to allow the scrutiny of the action of the formers by the latter and, eventually, the possibility of substitution, in legal terms, of those representants. This mere possibility would, by itself, endorses transparency in the exercise of power, and transparency is needed to strength that sentiment of trust between the contract parts.

Responsibility, transparency (communication and proximity) and trust are core values inherent to democratic regimes. In face of de so-called decay of democracy, it is not necessary to change the political regime, on the other hand, what is necessary is to strengthen it. And that is justified if we consider the alternatives that have been presented, more or less populist, that have degenerate, as history has showed, to forms of authoritarianism. What seems to be necessary is to find forma to endow those core values to a greater effectiveness and a more preponderant role in the exercise of power and for thar we must rethink, reinvent, rediscover new models of representativeness that may endorse the concrete claims of local communities e of those people that compose them, allowing them to affirm their one identity in the public sphere and in the political context of their lives.

Whether at a national or global level, what we are witnessing today is the fragmentation of social imaginaries. The modern uneasiness of being democratic can only be overcome by the empowerment of different and local social imaginaries.

Conclusion

Globalization has undoubtedly promoted the increase of inequities as it has impeded the affirmation of personal, national or regional identities, promoted the opposition to migrants movements and to the acceptance of refugees, it has weakened the democratic party system and contributed to the impairment of the social bond between the citizens and the national states. It is obvious that we are facing some major societal problems, but a wiser reaction to this is not to declare the end of national states nor even

to affirm an era of crises in democracy. To that effect it is necessary that ordinary citizens also directly benefit from globalization and globalism or, at least, that they gain some protection against its dangers, particularly as far the increase of inequities is concerned.

Taking Richard Higgott's affirmation into account, «The political system needs compromises that reconcile capitalism with *mass democracy*, not *cosmopolitan democratic elitism*. Governments of a non-populist persuasion need to re-boot the social contract between state and society and provide enough citizen incentive to make citizen preservation of capitalism a major societal commitment» (Higgott, 2018: p.13).

In the western world, the idea that sovereignty lays on the people, the equality among citizens and the existence of democratic political institutions constitute the imaginary of what it is a National State, what is legitimized and legitimated political autonomy and the power of self-determination.

In that sense, national states also become part of a particular cultural order that aims for modernization and progress and that justifies its power and territorial authority over their populations in the name of national sovereignty. In addition, the implementation of public policies justifies itself as a form of preservation and reproduction of the uniqueness of a national identity and, at the same time, in a global world, calls for the recognition of its specificity.

Apart from what is commonly taken to be true, for what has been said, we may conclude that National States distinguished from one another mostly by the comprehension of its cultural uniqueness rather than its normative constitution. It is the sense of nationhood, derived from the imaginary of a nation that shapes the structure, the constitution, and the regime that national states adopt. In a powerful statement that could help to understand our thesis about national states and nations, «nationalism is rarely the nationalism of the nation» (Anderson, 1991: p. 8)

This is how the vitality of a nation in a democratic regime and its capacity to act in the global sphere can be conceived without undermining its own identity and the needs and aspirations of its citizens. It will be the same logic of interdependence that allowed the vicious circle to be broken that also occurs on a global scale, where the political weakening of nations allows the economic deregulation of markets on a global scale, above all, and this power of economic structures weakens or even makes political globalism impossible.

It is necessary to attach a moral normativity to globalization where social values prevail over economic ones; it is necessary to affirm a stronger civic ethics, altruism in

relations and recognition of the importance of good governance. That should always be a political process, not an economic one, and it will only be possible under a democratic political regime.

It is necessary to reaffirm the structural importance of moral values in politics and not apathetically stand by witnessing the consolidation of instrumental economic values. It is necessary to go back to our democratic tradition based on values such as honour, trust, loyalty, human rights, respect for differences, equal opportunities. It is necessary to identify the new social imaginaries.

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