

Rethinking representative democracy

Representation beyond contestation & partisan politics

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Abstract

The current forms of representative democracy have come to face various fundamental challenges such as: decrease in political participation, distrust in partisan politics and politicians and perhaps increase of ideological polarization. To take solace in the belief that the current democratic tools are far from perfect yet the finest in modern societies, has not contributed to solution-oriented modifications of its efficacy. In this thesis Lua Nazerian intends to address the inadequacies and inherent limitations in the current form of representative democracy, by analyzing its underlying assumptions through a critical examination of the fundamental challenges in Classical pluralism, Agonist and Deliberative democratic theory. Furthermore, it proposes some modifications drawn from the Socratic idea of the non-pursuit of power, the bottom-up political approach and the learnings from the worldwide Baha'i community. The study is carried out within the field of international relations with a normative approach as well as it incorporates a case study of the Baha'i electoral and decision-making principle. Nevertheless, by using the Socratic idea together with the Baha'i principles in a bottom-up approach shifts then the paradigm from the inherent competitive culture of representative democracy to a more inclusive solution-oriented culture of learning.

Keywords: Representative; democracy; reform; Baha'i; Socrates; Normative; partisan politics, participation.

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1. Introduction

In country after country, people are losing faith in democracy. Their inclined distrust of politicians and the increased polarization are only a few consequences reflecting the challenges within today's democratic governance. Instead of a constructive political discourse where negotiations and compromises are born, individuals are becoming more and more inflexible and fixed to their own political identity. (Tormey 2015, p.16-21)

Some countries are shunning wider-embracing democratic integration for a seemingly more secure domestic focus, such as the case with the UK and Brexit. Others have put their hope in dominating and populist leaders, such as Putin and Trump, who promise to solve the problems of their societies, unconcerned with essential democratic principles and nuance. Is it perhaps time for democracy to evolve, as it has during past centuries, in accordance to needs of today's society?

A few countries are experimenting with new forms of governance, for example a deliberative mini-public that can be found in Canada, Australia and Iceland. Needless to say, the idea of democracy has evolved over recent decades and has become adapted in many new iterations. Perhaps representative democracy is seen as the most familiar one in today's societies. At the same time, there are modern manifestations of the classical direct democracy model (eg. in Switzerland), which has its roots in ancient Greek polis.

In between the representative and direct iterations lays the third normative theory of democracy, namely, deliberative democracy. Since 2016 Ireland has been forming the deliberative arena called 'The Citizens Assembly', a model where 99 randomly selected individuals get to discuss and consult, under the guidance of a chair person, on different topics such as climate change, abortion and constitutional reform. However, the question still remains, is it working? Do constituents feel like their voices are being equally heard? Are they truly and justly represented by the chosen candidates?

The democratic assumption that a state should be under the people's rule, where power lies in the hands of the inhabitants and thus reflects the collective will of the populace, has been debated within political sciences for centuries. Some of the discussions revolve around

questions about whether representative democracy actually represents the will of the people and whether the populace's desire and willingness to make their voices heard is fully exercised in the arena of partisan politics.

The predominant understanding of representative democracy is that it is, so far, the best well-functioning system in the modern society, yet it is not perfect in essence and have some fundamental shortcomings. To simply take consolation in this idea is what made me ask: is this the best mankind can construct? Moreover, my experiences with the Baha'i community made me curious to see whether a similar implementation of its system could benefit the current challenges facing representative democracy.

This study intends, at a theoretical and political-philosophical level, to analyze and discuss the underlying assumptions that underpin today's representative democracy, through a critical examination of its challenges. Furthermore, it aims to discuss and propose some modifications that could add to the efficacy of the current iteration of representative democracy, by analyzing some of the guiding principles unique to representative democracy applied through a bottom-up approach to politics, and drawing some learnings from the worldwide Baha'i community by relating it to how the Socratic idea of the non-pursuit of power align or differ from one another.

My hope is that, this thesis, invokes and enkindles a new kind of curiosity on the deeper issues of efficient ways in which to govern a state with tools associated with representative democracy.

As Kofi Annan said:

Every new idea and initiative meets with resistance. We have to find the courage to take risks, even to fail, if the goal is worthwhile (Kofiannanfoundation n.d.).

1.1. Aim and research objective

Numerous alternative models of democratic governance have been proposed to address the challenges identifying with the current form of representative democracy. However, the discussion is dominated by what is and less by what ought to be. There are some suggested new models of democracy, yet there is a gap in critically assessing the role of partisan politics.

In this thesis, I intend to address the inadequacies and inherent limitations in the current form of representative democracy, by analyzing its underlying assumptions through a critical examination of the fundamental challenges in Classical pluralism, Agonist and Deliberative democracy. Moreover, by proposing some modifications to the current system drawn from the Socratic idea of the non-pursuit of power, the down-top political approach and the learnings from the worldwide Baha'i community.

As a student of international relations this study will be carried out with a normative approach interfused with a case study of the Baha'i electoral and decision-making guiding principles. The relevance of the study, both in societal means and in the field of political sciences/international relations, is the unique proposal of representative democracy beyond a culture of contestation and partisan politics inspired by the Socratic writings and the worldwide Baha'i electoral principles.

The guiding questions for this thesis will be addressed in a chronological order, in that way the first question will offer a demarcation of what is meant with the various limitations, thus the last two question will generate a more specific outlook, whereby new suggestions for representative democracy will be offered. The guiding questions are:

1. What are some of the inadequacies and limitations inherent in the current forms of democracy?
2. What could be some of the guiding principles for addressing the inadequacies in democracy?
3. The worldwide Baha'i community as a case: an ongoing experiment with new guiding principles for democracy; what could be learned?

1.2. Background

1.2.1. The rise of representative democracy

At the very center of the conception of representative democracy lays the importance of electoral choice as a driving force in which representation emerges. (Narud & Aalberg 1999, p. 18-19) The nature of the electoral process characterizing representative democracy is a mix of aristocratic, democratic, egalitarian and in egalitarian influences.

The idea of liberal democracy, is in fact, composed of two principles long thought incompatible. Whereas Liberalism has its own ideology regarding a constitutional order, democracy is based on the idea of free elections on more equal grounds. Of course democracy is the older one of the two principles, with roots from ancient Athens, 508-507 BCE and is today referred to as *classical direct democracy*. The entitlement and obligation to attend debates and assemblies around important topics was extended to those regarded as Athenian citizens (which was only around 15 percent of the population, since women, slaves, immigrants, and men without property, were excluded). Furthermore, office-holders were randomly selected and not elected. This kind of random selection still prevails today, for example during jury-selection in the American court system, and is also found with certain modifications within deliberative democracy. (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009, p. 18-19)

For centuries, neither political philosophers nor political thinkers would ascribe themselves as democrats until the end of the eighteenth century during the enlightenment, what was rooted in the American and French revolutions. In the 1790s, Maximillian Robespierre started referring to democracy in a rather positive light than had been done previously, by emphasizing the will of the people. It was in that same period when Babeuf stated that the people have the right to freely exercise sovereignty and the English political theorist Thomas Paine brought together the ideas of representation and democracy. This paved the way for representative democracy and made it the predominant form of governance in practice and in research. This new iteration of democracy contributed to the transformation and development of, what Robert Dahl, referred to as the second wave of democracy. (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009, p. 19-24)

According to Schumpeter, democratic elections are the only means for the selection of suitable leaders, based on the idea that different parties should compete for power. The underlying assumption here is that by offering a platform for competition, one can safeguard the democratic process. However, Mill argues that elections are merely a defensive mechanism with the primary goal to prevent a government from abusing power rather than actively being part of decision making policy.

The representative democracy originating from models derived after the American, English, and French revolutions approach elections as the only means for the selection of those who are considered wise and educated, reflecting aristocratic ideals. Liberal democracy on the other hand stands for the equal right of the people to elect and be elected. In the same fashion, philosophers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu would have agreed on the fact that elections are by nature aristocratic, thus they fail to select representatives that resembles their constituents. Even though today's elections more or less create an elite body of elected candidates, the process promotes the idea of equal rights and manifests it to a degree. Thus, it is an egalitarian process, in the sense that each citizen has the equal right to choose representatives or the choice to discharge them. This inherent duality in the electoral process, on one hand the selection and on the other the rejection, are fundamental and core functions upon which representative democracy rests. (Narud & Aalberg 1999, p. 18-19)

2. Design and Methodology

Since the nature of this thesis, in contrast to an empirical one, is a theoretical and normative one, it implies that the methodology used, enables the process and the work itself to guide the research. Therefore, the different ideas, ideologies and philosophies are the ones that guide the structure of the thesis instead of a fixed methodological model. The importance here will be to present these in a logical argumentation, which will act as the guiding part of the research.

2.1. Normative political theory

Within the scientific discipline for political sciences, are two main different scientific paradigms. These paradigms dictate the nature of the attempted research in which different questions are more or less appropriate. On one hand, there is the so called positive approach, that tends to study a political phenomenon or subject in a descriptive and value neutral manner. This is applied through an empirical study on the reality out there, rather than how the political reality ought to be. (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2017, p. 174)

As stated by Robert Dahl:

The empirical political scientist is concerned with what is [...] not with what ought to be [...]. The behaviorally minded student of politics is prepared to describe values as empirical data; but, qua 'scientist' he seeks to avoid prescription or inquiry into the grounds on which judgments of value can properly be made (1961, pp. 770–771).

On the other hand, is the normative approach, that through a value-based perspective makes assumptions about how the social world is ought to be. In this light, normative theories are interested in what kind of standards the political arena ought to be found on. By offering different ideals and standards, does not pertain that they have to be achieved in this given moment. Since normative theory studies and suggests various normative principles, one has to understand the scientific contribution it makes by understanding the place of norms in a society. According to Pietrzyk-Reeves a norm is “In the social and political context, norms can be understood descriptively as standards of behavior of social and political action, or prescriptively as reasons which dictate a certain choice of action. In ethics norms mean moral standards.” (2017, p. 176-177)

Thus in order to understand the place of normative studies, we must take in consideration the given context and the history of the current ideologies that a political text was given born to. This is made possible by adapting the normative vocabulary that was used when the author

presented his or her ideas. (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2017, p. 177-178)

Since today's methods are predominantly empirical in nature, the role of the normative approach was questioned by some political scholars. The most known critic is the fact that normative theory is not value neutral and has a value based starting point, which lacks in its contribution to an objective truth about reality. (Pietrzyk-Reeves 2017, p. 173-174)

However, according to other scholars such as Anna-Liisa Närvänen, the hunt after value neutral content in social sciences is a myth and that objectivity should therefore not be a criterion. Hence, the quest of objectivity is the search after the sustainability of the logical arguments that are presented, rather than the assessment of whether a research has a value based content. (1988, p. 15-16)

As Earl Babbie stated in his book *Observing ourselves, Essays in social research*:

Individual scientists cannot be value-free, any more than we can be truly objective. All of us have values, beliefs, opinions, biases, expectations, and other points of view that influence what we see. Sometimes you can recognize how your values are affecting your research and take steps to counteract such influences. Sometimes you can do no more than acknowledge what your points of view may be. You should be most cautious when you think you have no biases operating, since you surely have some. (1986, p. 176-177)

Now, in which ways does a normative approach by using normative political theory, contribute to the field of political sciences, political philosophy and international relations in this particular thesis? Since the field of political sciences is predominating by research that is based on empirical evidences, explaining and describing reality as it is, it is time to also offer some new models, systems or moral frameworks that could contribute to the betterment of what already exists. In this case, the discussion on the issue of representative democracy has existed since ancient Greece and been passed on to today's academic arena. Carried out by both a positive and a normative approach.

However, representative democracy is facing some new challenges in this modern age, that simply cannot be solved by a mere observation or description of its democratic challenges. Thus, on one hand, this normative thesis aims to, embedded in an academic and ontological discussion rooted in previous research, offer some new approaches to the current form of

representative democracy. On the other hand, the normative value presented in this thesis will pave the way for further research, whereas these values can be tested in the empirical reality. The academic field can only gain a more holistic understanding of our reality, how its perceived, how it functions and on which principles it's based on, by combining both positive and normative approaches.

As John Gerring and Joshua Yesnowitz argue:

Empirical study in the social sciences is meaningless if it has no normative import' while 'a normative argument without empirical support may be rhetorically persuasive or logically persuasive, but it will not have demonstrated anything about the world out there" (2006, p. 133)

2.2. Material

The nature of this thesis is predominately a normative theoretical one with some empirical elements. In order to righteously discuss and present my claim I will mostly use, the relevant, primary but also secondary sources both from previous research and from the worldwide Baha'i community. These sources will be the different writings, documents and the constitution of the supreme body, The Universal House of Justice.

3. Previous research and Theory

When the idea of democracy was first presented, it was seen as a normative idea in itself. Since that's the case, tackling the normative claim of democracy with a normative approach is a fully legitimate and relevant way to study the democratic paradigm. In order to study the democratic paradigm, in regards to its underlying assumptions on participation and contestation, one has to analyze its nature by transcending from the paradigm itself. In other words, one has to be outside of the box in order to recognize the separate object, the box.

Hence, to take a starting point in the various political theories that analyze the very paradigm that will be critically examined, increases the risk of falling into the paradigm itself.

In this thesis, the different political theories will be discussed in the light of them serving as theoretical views in the analyze object, the democratic paradigm, rather than using them as theoretical glasses that examines the thesis. The thesis is demarcated by using three main theories presented here and later discussed in my analyses: Classical pluralism, the agonistic model and deliberative democratic models. These three symbolizes a historical chronology of political ideas at the same time as they offer different starting points: Neo-Liberalistic, liberalistic and post-Marxistic views. Nonetheless, the discussions in this thesis, could be regarded as keystones for perhaps the start of a new theory building.

Within a broader research framework, I would suggest the inclusion of the theoretical ideas born with the enlightenment theorist such as: John Locke, Emanuel Kant, Karl Marx, John Rawls, Hannah Arendt, Max Weber and Thomas Hobbs.

3.1. Previous research

Simon Tormey discusses in his book, *The end of representative politics*, That representative democracy is facing some challenges that by many political scientist is dismissed and that they simply take comfort in that representative democracy has proven itself to be the ultimate form of political governance (2015, p. 16). One of the ways to measure whether a political system is meeting the needs of the population is by measuring votes. As Tormey phrased it “A declining turnout is, by contrast, often taken to indicate that something is wrong, and that therefore we ought to be worried about the relationship between citizens and the political system.” (2015, p. 17). He also emphasizes the lack of trust in politicians, that without trust in the system the machinery cannot generate political participation. “If we don’t trust our representatives, then it is but a short step to querying how long the system can continue.” (Tormey 2015, p. 21).

Given the fact that trust is lacking in politicians, thus, an automatic consequence is the lack of interest in politics on a general basis. Furthermore, the idea of party-based representative democracy is one that is based on the process of contestation. Many political scientists tend to

think that this competitive system is one that guarantees an equal right to power, according to Tormey. However, this rotation between parties have mainly been between some major parties only. The fact that representative democracy should be representing the majority it is the politics of minorities (Tormey 2015, p. 54-57). The problem is vaster than just a struggle facing the current form of democracy. It is both a problem of citizens falling into the pit of apathy, by feeling hopelessness and that their votes don't count, and the profession of politicians that attracts a specific group of individuals to represent the people. Tormey also discusses the problem of neoliberalism and its limitations, appealing to individual freedom from the government and thus politicians. (Tormey 2015, p. 62-68).

However, in the post-Marxist and poststructuralist view, Ernesto Laclau argues that representative democracy has a constitutive role within a hegemonic understanding of the political. Laclau's defense of representative politics is based on the idea of hegemonic representation, that is a process that creates social relations based on power and the logic of representation. That if unequal distribution of social power shapes the social structure, it is then considered a hegemonic social order (1985, p. 94-148). Laclau mean that the relationship between the represented and the representatives are fundamental and play an important role. It is a relationship that is established when the representative makes decisions in one place that affect another part. In this particular way the representative ensures the interest of the represented.

Tormey's and Laclau's offers some new starting points that question or defend representative politics, however, their research doesn't suggest any new model of representative democracy that is sustainable and have been tested for over decades. Nevertheless, Tormey discusses the Zapatistas case which will be examined further in the analyses part. With this research in mind, the thesis will take its starting point to question and examine alternative ways which could improve our current form of representative democracy.

3.2. Classical Pluralism

The pluralist belief rests on the idea that there are multiple ways in which on can approach life with. That there is a diversity in ideas, thoughts, knowledge thus power should also be decentralized and distributed equally in society under a harmonious competition. Hence the best way to achieve the above mentioned criteria would be through a practice of liberal

democracy. In a way pluralism does not believe in an absolute truth or that society is ought to function under a singular philosophical, cultural, religious idea and values or a believe system that promotes uniformity and universality. Thus it is relative in its nature. The normative theory of pluralism underlines the advantages and importance of a society that is based on cultural and social diversity. In a practical manner by creating and promoting various ways of institutional forms that is embedded in the idea that life is lived by different values and believes that exists in an equilibrium. On the other hand, the explanatory theory focuses on how policies are made in an environment that is across diverse national and international actors and institutions of societies. Sometimes liberal democracies are seen as a form of Polyarchy, in the since that many are involved in the government and not few. nevertheless, the driving political machinery for this very idea is achieved through competitive elections. In the 1950s, pluralism was the dominating approach that was used in American politics in order to analyze liberal democracy's. (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009, p. 35-36)

Weber and Schumpeter's could be seen as the immediate sources of pluralism. However, its theoretical terminology was divided into two different branches: one is the utilitarian understanding and the other is the Madisonian stream originated in American democratic theory. According to Robert Dahl (one of the prominent intellects of pluralism), Madison was one of the first to offer an explanation of the American political system. As mentioned before, the main processes pluralists are concerned with is how individuals create processes by combining their efforts in the political platform competing for power. As David Held (200) formulated it "like Madison, they accepted that a fundamental purpose of government is to protect the freedom of factions to further their political interests while preventing any individual faction from undermining the freedom of others". (Held 1996, p. 199-200)

The three practical features pluralism is built on are: Individual rights, decentralized governments and institutional balance of power. When it comes to individual rights, philosophers such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill promoted the right for freedom of speech and private property in any social context. The individual right is seen as human attribute that all individuals possess as birth right. The idea of decentralized governments was established simultaneously as the constitution of the United States in 1789. At the time Alexis de Tocqueville noted that the United States had a module of democracy that was lacking central administration and instead was spread out on different actors and institutions. In regards to institutional balance, the idea here is to dismantle the absolute powers of monarchy

by assigning the executive, judicial and legislative powers to different institutions. The French Thinker Baron Montesquieu coined the term “separation of powers” in which he connected to the British monarch that at that time was had a power structure that was more inclusive and comparative than the rest of Europe. (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009, p. 36-37)

3.3. The Agonistic Model

The liberalistic point of view has for some year now dominated both the political and democratic arena. This domination, is for many, a symbol of cooperation that lays on a positivistic view of the human nature. The problems with democracy, however, are more manifest than ever before. For the prominent post-Marxist, Chantal Mouffe, it is crucial to examine the failures with the current liberalistic democracy, by offering her own theory of Agonism. She argues that less people are prone to actively participate in politics, people feel that the traditional parties are not representing the interest of the people and right-wing parties are gaining more power in many European countries. This due to the fact that liberal democracy is failing to please the people. (Hallberg & Jansson & Mörkenstam 2009, P. 285-286)

The theory of Agonism also called Agonistic pluralism is in itself a critique of universalism and rationalism that Mouffe developed in her book, *The return of the political*, and further more in her other book, *Agonistics*. The two key concepts that are frequently used by Mouffe are “hegemony” and “antagonism”. She argues that the current political world is based on an antagonistic ideal, whereas society is divided and so is power, but not only divided, they are ought to perceive the other as an antagonist. Regarding hegemonic practices, Mouffe refers to it as different articulations that creates fixed social institutions. (Mouffe 2013, P. 1-3)

In order to understand Mouffes critique of rationalism we have to consider identifies. In fact, she argues that in politics we have to consider the shaping of identities, and that these collective identities are relational. The precondition for an identity is that it is in relation to another identity. Thus a relation of the “we” and “them” is prone to create an antagonistic culture, where the demarcation of the “we” is its “they”. The tendency for an antagonistic political culture, however, it is not necessary manifested in every relational act. But it is worth noting, that all identities can fall into either a friend-zoon or an enemy-zoon. If the other

(they) could, instead of being conceived as different be seen as enemies that are threatening the existence of the other (we), then we have an antagonistic relation. (Mouffe 2013, P. 4-5)

Mouffes solution to this lasting problem of liberal democracy, is to rethink the relationship between identities. By providing what's called *the agonistic model*, Mouffe at first only wanted to offer a metaphoric redescription that could analyze pluralistic democracy from the outside. The two main political theories, the deliberative model and the aggregative one both have failed to address the role of collective identities. Hence, Mouffe emphasizes the importance of passions that act as driving forces in the political arena. The argument she offers in her book *The Democratic Paradox*, is that instead of trying to achieve consensus between the people by exclusion, which liberal democracy is doing, it is far more important to create a culture where this us/them exists under more stable conditions. Thus, antagonism defines the relation between enemies, and in contrast to that, Mouffe offers the agonistic definition which is the relation between adversaries. The central thing in an agonistic perspective is the adversary, a respectful relation to the opponent even though one disagrees with their point of view. This in turn shapes the agonistic struggle that is the driving force in a vibrant democracy. The duty of a well-functioning democracy, thus, is by having this culture of confrontation on different political positions. Mouffe argues that this is exactly what liberal democracy has failed to do which have led to disaffection with the political situation and thus an attitude of apathy towards political participation. (Mouffe 2013, P. 6-10)

3.4. Deliberative democracy

The idea of deliberative democracy is a form of democracy which is generally perceived to be in between direct classical democracy and representative democracy. Even though the idea of deliberative democracy was born in Athens in the fifth century B.C. the birthplace of democracy, recently it has become more attractive and relevant form of democracy. Perhaps it offers solutions to the struggles with the current form of representative democracy that has not fully been considered practically in contemporary democracy. (Elster 1998, p. 1-2)

At the core of deliberative democracy lays the idea of deliberation. That through discussions between free and equal citizens and consensus decision-making process, citizens become more active in democracy, thus the gap between the citizens and decision-makers is

minimized. Since, in deliberative democracy, the line between the different actors, citizens and the public sphere is suddenly blurred out, it is important to consider the various approaches for deliberation. Dryzek argues that the best approach is to compare the different theoretical approaches by not picking an ideal form of deliberation. While Young thinks that diversity of thought and political opinions is the bases for deliberative democracy and that the civil society is what is represented in politics. There are a few more theoretical branches which are connected to deliberation such as liberal constitutionalism, rational choice theory, social choice theory, critique theory and the difference democracy critique, that will not be discussed in depth due to the limitation and the scope of this thesis. (Zeleznik 2016, p. 35-37)

One of the foremost spokesman, in the nineteenth-century, of governing a state by discussions was John Stuart Mill. Mill argued that representative democracy rejects the potential for the representative to learn through a give and take discussion with the fellow citizens. He also stresses the nature of human fallibility, whereas a representative have the potential to fail to represent and promote the common good. While the philosopher David Hume sought that the role of institutions is to prevent the damage human fallibilities could do. Whereas Mill putts emphasis on how institutions ought to morally align these fallibilities by having discussions. (Elster 1998, p. 3-6)

Another well-known advocate of deliberation is Jurgen Habermas. He offered a two-track model that on one hand assumes democracy based on the state, where the formation of will accurse, and on the other hand a strong public sphere, where opinions are formulated. In other words, in the center of a deliberative system lays the state and its legislature. However, Parkinson and Mansbridge offered a different approach to deliberation, which widens the scope of what is meant with the state and civil society, by looking beyond the nations boundaries so to include different non state actors and institutions. Dryzek wide definition of the state here is organizations and individuals that are legally authorized to take binding decisions for how a society should be organized on a macro level of deliberation. (Zeleznik 2016, p. 37-38)

4. Analysis: Critique and Resolutique

4.1. Some arbitrary limitations with the various underlying assumptions

In order to tackle any given challenges with any system one has to understand the pillars on which this system is standing on. In other words, the core values and believes on which a system is fully built on. In this particular case, on one hand, by dissecting the different theory's and philosophical thoughts to their core, and on the other hand, to study and understand the various consequences of these underlying assumptions in which the current system embodies.

Needless to say, the pluralistic belief is one that is well established in the current form of democracy. The proposed idea of the human nature here, is similar to the liberalistic one. In contrast to realism that has a rather pessimistic view of the human nature, Pluralism tends to shed light on the diversity and the ability of cooperation between individuals, institutions and various actors. The post-marxistic view Mouffe suggested, is also one that agrees with this view, however, not on the terms of perceiving the other as an antagonist but rather as an agonist. The same perspective of the human nature is applied to deliberative democracy, yet, with a twist that cooperation can be enhances with the implementation of deliberation.

Nevertheless, that potential for cooperation that pluralism, agonism and deliberation advocates, is one that is realized and practiced within the arena of competition. Pluralism mean that diversity of though, ideologies, cultures and values are ought to coexist in the same society, yet that the potential of them to emerge is rather an idealistic view or an idea that mimic the communistic regime or religious uniformity. Thus equal cooperation is only attained within the realm of contestation between the different ideologies. Whereas, the idea of deliberation strives to create a platform where these different ideologies can come together and through deliberation be able to achieve higher aims of consensus decision-making. The additional element that outstands deliberation is consensus decision-making processes. While, the agonistic model rejects the idea of consensus by simply saying, that it is more important to establish a culture that embraces us/them under more harmonies conditions. That liberal

democracy today is in fact doing the opposite by focusing on majority consensus by excluding minorities.

The prevailing premise in the three theoretical frameworks, as previously discussed, is that there will always be multiple ways of living and a diversity of thoughts and ideologies. Hence these ideas will constantly be clashing with each other, thus it is best to let them compete for power under a democratic system. Even though the various views differ in their meaning of competition and how it ought to be practiced, the conversation and the different models offered are nonetheless recurring within the prevailing paradigm of competitive democracy.

According to Michael Karlberg the three assumptions on which competitive democracy is based on are: 1) Even though the current view of the human nature allows for cooperation, it is essentially competitive and selfish. 2) the different needs, interest and values will inevitably clash hence there is a potential of thimble and disorder. 3) given the two first assumptions, the foremost just and efficient way to utilize a diversity within a society is through open and equal competition. Karlberg further explains that because of these assumptions, competitive democratic countries try to prevent the excessive power from being in the hands of a given group or individuals (2007, p. 136-137). He counties to explain:

And this is the reason that most competitive democracies struggle, to this day, to reign in the limits, campaign finance reforms, and other stopgap measures. Yet none of these efforts dunnfamentally change the nature or the fruit of the system, because the fruit is inherent in the systems internal assumptions – its seeds (Karlberg 2007, p. 137)

The remaining questions are then, are these assumptions sincerely optimistic as we have perceived them to be? Is the theories description of the human nature, truly the highest limit of human potential for cooperation? What if a different assumption would be exercised with the believe that cooperation is attainable beyond the prevailing culture of political competition?

Now, how do these current theoretical assumptions actually affect the real world of politics? One of its dominating machineries is the political arena for partisanship, where campaigning, electoral and decision-making process are offered on the bases of competition. Whereas the

outcome is to win on the bases of any cost. The primary focus is then on competing which puts other important values in the periphery. As David Held stated in his book *Models of democracy*:

Parties may aim to realize a programme of “ideal” political principles, but unless their activities are based on systematic strategies for achieving electoral success they will be doomed to insignificance. Accordingly, parties become transformed, above all else, into means for fighting and winning elections (1996, p. 170)

Another outcome from the competitive political arena is partisan politics. The various parties could be seen as baskets filled with handpicked principles, values, beliefs and ideologies that then are interwoven together into a party program. The fundamental issue here isn't that these parties then are presented in contrast to the other ideologies. The problem rather lays in the simplistic observation of reality which creates the false choice dilemma. In other words, the party construct offers a set of values and ideas that can, to a certain extent, be combined in alliances, yet, it gives rise to a false dichotomy where the voter is forced to only pick a single perspective of reality offered in the form of a party. This kind of dichotomy is what also gives rise to fanaticism and strengthens the gap between the two extreme poles. For example, the rise of the right wing parties in Europe could perhaps be explained by examining the core assumption in the partisan political system. What if all parties combined can offer something much bigger and more holistic than just one perspective, one party, can? Are the different parties necessarily so different that cooperation is not attainable unless it is exercised in the clothing of contestation? The arbitrary limitations of a system of partisan politics, even though it intends to serve the pluralistic ideas and needs in society, it is doomed to fail under its core assumptions, to represent the people under equal circumstances. its biggest strength is yet one of its apparent weaknesses.

Given the political context of competition, voters have to choose those whom will represent their voices in the different parties and in the parliament. Representatives today are individuals that made the decision to be politically active. Hence power more or less lays in the hands of those who actively seek to represent a group of people. These representatives are many times limited in their choices to only advocate what their party stands for, even though they might have other thoughts or opinions on any given mater. Therefore, the idea of human

fallibility was discussed in deliberative democracy, specially on the matter that representatives are not free from error which can lead to them seeking to increase their own gain instead of the promotion of the common good. But what if representatives could also be those who are not actively seeking to represent? What if there was a different system that picked representatives, not based on the party they belong to, but rather based on their character, a set of virtues or a good moral conduct? naturally then, the question arises of what is a good character and what kind of virtues are to find in a good representative? In the same way as the questions about democracy came to being, what democratic values are we to seek for? What is a good governance under democratic values? The issue of ethics and moral is inevitable in the nature of this discussion. In fact, they are the very fabric of each society and civilization that has existed.

4.2. An alternative solution: The Socratic-idea and the bottom-up approach

Needless to say, drawing conclusions from the previous discussion, it is then clear that depending on the fundamental understanding of the human nature different political structures are then born in accordance to believe in what the “human potential” is able to achieve. In other words, any underlying assumption can either limit our understanding of reality and the potentials latent in it, or widen our horizons of what we as a species are able to attain. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, that it is generally an accepted idea that the current political system is not perfect as it is, but that it is the most well-functioning system we have so far. On one hand, depending on what variables we are measuring, one could state that it indeed is the most well-functioning system that we have acquired today. However, on the other hand, to be content with what is the most functioning system, does not mean that one has to stop here. Thus my main interest here is to challenge this assumption by offering some guiding principles for addressing the inadequacies in this current form of democracy.

My starting point here is based on a different view of the human nature, than was presented in pluralism, agonism and deliberative democracy. The assumption is that the human nature is prone to cooperate not only on the bases of contestation but rather beyond the competitive nature as its top potential. What if a society is organized on a wider understanding instead of different ideas coexisting in the same geographic area? that together they can form a new and more diverse culture? Perhaps what I am suggesting here is a new political model with a

different assumption of the human nature at its core, by applying a moral-framework based on a set of principles on which a society is founded on.

The idea so far is that in order for representative democracy to work, there has to be those whom can or want to represent the people. However, there are some fundamental issues that arise with this logic. The first one is the fact that the representatives have more or less actively sought to represent a group of people. As deliberative democracy points out the human fallibility, there will always be a risk that the representatives have an agenda to maintain power, to promote their own interest or at least to serve the interest of a smaller group of the population. The second argument is that since the supply of representatives is based on the choice of individuals, whether to run for candidate or not, the risk is that the demand of the wider population is not fulfilled and thus they fall into the false-dichotomy of limited choices. It's possible that it is a certain type of people that always want to represent, which can lead to a form of homogeneous culture. In other words, the supply of representatives will therefor fall short in reflecting the diverse need of the wider society. The third argument is that there is a possibility that other individuals than politicians, whom seek to represent the people, are more suitable to represent the interest or needs of the wider society. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates would argue that philosophers are the ones who are suited to rule, hence the rise of the idea of philosopher-kings (Plato 2013). However, I would argue that not only philosophers or politicians are capable to represent, but to draw on the diversity out there in the wider society.

Nevertheless, tackling these various issues with the current form of representative democracy, requires some fundamental changes in the root assumptions of the system itself. Therefore, I argue that those whom ought to represent should 1) be the once whom are not seeking to rule or represent. 2) those whom act in accordance to serve their fellow beings interest and not only their own parties or other interest groups. The Following two points will be further discussed in the coming paragraphs.

An attempt will be made to create a new model, that is partly inspired from the Socratic principle that the best rulers are those who are reluctant to rule but still do so from a place of necessity and duty rather than a wish to poses power. Socrates mainly discusses the role of the ruler which I here will use interchangeably as the role of the representatives. As Socrates stated in the Republic:

It is for just this reason, my dear Thrasymachus, that I said a moment ago that no one willingly chooses to rule and get mixed up in straightening out other people's troubles; but he asks for wages, because the man who is to do anything fine by art never does what is best for himself nor does he command it, insofar as he is commanding by art, but rather what is best for the man who is ruled. It is for just this reason, as it seems, that there must be wages for those who are going to be willing to rule—either money, or honor, or a penalty if he should not rule. (Plato 2013, 346e-347a)

However, The Socratic idea here is that even though the fittest to rule/represent is not willing to rule, “they must be compelled to rule” (Plato 2013, 539e). I argue that compelling others to do anything against their will is inefficient and makes others question the sincerity of the rulers/representative’s intention. The same questioning of someone’s intention is also valid for those who are willingly pursuing power.

Socrates mean that the true ruler ought to have certain characteristics which are prerequisites for a good society. One of them is that “the man who is really a lover of learning, must from youth on strive as intensely as possible for every kind of truth” (Plato 2013, 485d), in that way the ruler/representative from a young age learn to see the complex diversity embedded in the social reality.

In my opinion there could be a certain truth to the idea that the ruler ought to be detached from the idea of ruling, however, this has to be combined with other criteria. Moreover, the current partisan political system in itself has to be reformed. What I am suggesting here is a different form of representative democracy that is not based on partisan politics, but rather on a model that serves the needs and interests of the wider population by offering spaces for deliberation with the purpose to create a consensus that reflects the diversity of the population. This, could be interpreted as a call for uniformity as the basis for a society. Some would even go so far to say that without partisan politics there is no democracy, that it may be a form of communism, dictatorship or other forms of governing a state. The way human beings understand reality is often by connecting bits of information from the past in order to make something relatable. In this case, suggesting a new form of democracy by removing partisan politics, has to be openly examined with renewed eyes and approached with an

innovational mentality, in order for this discussion to be fruitful.

What is then suggested is a form of representative democracy that is freed from the culture of contestation as Karlberg discusses in his book *Beyond the culture of contest*. The removal of contestation then implies the dispose of partisan politics, campaigning and the pursue of power. Instead, of representatives represent the party they stand for, they represent the diverse interest of the wider population. The main machinery would be the space for communication and discussions on the different issues of a society, where clash of ideas is welcome in order to find some new ideas by melting together the diverse opinions. In order for this to work, I assert that a nation has then to change its institutional approach to politics, by removing the top-down approach with a bottom-up structure approach. Instead of having municipality or national-elections only, the approach would start by elections from the community level to the local level then the national level and lastly the international level.

A structure like this, has the potential to empower the people on the grassroots-level by bringing politics down to the people in the communities. It could generate a more active community and civil life which in turn could lead to a stronger collectivism. Politics then becomes much closer to people's hearts, thus, a vibrant community has the capacity to replace apathy with engagement, sympathy, hope and the power to act. A community like that, according to my hypothesis, is then more prone to take active participation in different decision-making and elector processes. In this way, the gap between the different decision-making processes on the national level and what actually happens on the grassroots, is more likely to be perceived as a less distant reality. Moreover, the feeling of distrust in politicians could be minimized when the voters know the characters of those whom they can vote for as representatives on a community and local level. Thus the question of - how to know who to vote for if all ought to be seen as potential representatives in each community? – is less of an issue in a strong and active community life. On the contrary, it offers a geographic and psychological nearness to the idea of election and political activism. Of course, there are all sorts of risks when a new model is suggested, hence things will not be perfect in the begging of the process of implementation. Things like a high risk for nepotism or corruption are always a factor to have in mind no matter what form of democracy it relates to.

A society that is built on a bottom-up approach, reflects a level of respect to the diverse ideas, thoughts and ways of living instead of neglecting the civil-society. This humble relationship

between politics and the societal life, cannot but succeed to offer trust and empowerment. Perhaps one could say that it starts with morality in any community, that then has to be politically organized in order to have order. This could indeed be seen as a nearly impossible ask, or a utopian and a naïve wish, however, the quest for betterment is never born from a place of satisfaction and comfort, but rather from the deepest thirst to fulfill mankind's highest potential. Hence, it is not only the responsibility of representatives to maintain that goal, on the contrary, it is a responsibility of all. As David Packard said "the betterment of society is not a job to be left to a few. It's a responsibility to be shared by all." (Azquotes n.d.)

5. Case study: The worldwide Baha'i community

In order to understand the previous discussion, one has to take the theoretical and principle level and apply it practically in the current reality. In this thesis we will take a look at a single outstanding attempt that have been made in the worldwide Baha'i community. In particular how the Baha'i community is applying such guiding principles, as previously discussed, in order to improve the current form of representative democracy. Moreover, the worldwide Baha'i community will be examined in the light of an example on good governance and what could be learned from their experiences.

There are various other attempts that have been made in regards to reform or go beyond representative democracy. There are some cases of non-partisan democracy that could be found in various countries. Some de facto cases are found in Niue, Palau and Niue, other de jure cases are found in Kuwait, Oman and the Persian Gulf states. There is also the case of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation that has protested against the state of Mexico and could be seen as a civil-group that is taking politics beyond representative democracy, an interesting case that have been examined by some political scientist (Tormey 2006)

However, the Baha'i case is the only known experiment in reforms toward good governance, which is both global in scope and extended in time – applying systematically its conceptual framework, stretching from the grassroots-level, strengthening local community life, all the way to the national-levels, and up to the global level of governance, a supranational-level that

passes beyond the nation state. This unique system is nothing like any other form of governance that has been seen in any given historical context. Yet, it is not widely known in today's academic field. Thus, I will present the case as an experiment from which the field of political sciences and international relations can draw some learnings from.

As stated by the Baha'i supreme body, The Universal House of Justice:

The experience of the Baha'i community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity" and that" If the Baha'i experience can contribute in whatever measure to reinforcing hope in the unity of the human race, we are happy to offer it as a model for study." (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

The Baha'i community is consisting of around four million people from around the world. It's a diverse community that has members from many cultures, nations, creeds and classes. It is both a spiritual enterprise as well as it is serving the social and economic needs of mankind as a whole. As stated by the Universal House of Justice "It is a single social organism, representative of the diversity of the human family, conducting its affairs through a system of commonly accepted consultative principles, and cherishing equally all the great outpourings of divine guidance in human history." (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d). With its main message, that the human family has the potential to live equally in a united global society, no matter what challenges are to face the human race. (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d).

In the constitution of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme body of its administrative order, it is said that the purpose of the faith "is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure." (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

The Baha'i electoral system is unique in the way that its foundation is utterly nonpartisan, which makes it free from the competitive culture. It's a system that rejects all forms of

campaigning, lobbyism, propaganda, nominations and remarks of or indications of individuals marketing themselves. The voters in this case are expected, in the light of their freewill, to be guided through their own conscience to pick those whom they think possess a set of qualities that makes them eligible to serve in Baha'i institutions, whether on a local, national or global level. Such necessary qualities for good leadership are those who can best combine the qualities of: 1) unquestioned loyalty, 2) selfless devotion to others, 3) a well-trained mind, 4) recognized ability among others, 5) developed a mature experience. As it is said in the guidelines: "They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality." (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

In this way elections are not seen as a way to possess any kind of privilege or power, instead the elected representative is called upon to serve no matter their occupation, background, gender, ethnicity and life situation. In fact, the elected individual has is called on to serve in accordance. Interestingly, that request of votes, which is part of the current partisan political system, is the opposite of the above mentioned qualities which in a Baha'i fashion is regarded as lack of the required abilities for qualification.

The purpose with the Baha'i electoral system is to elect representatives whom serve as part of either the so called local or national spiritual assembly, or on the global scope The Universal House of Justice. Each assembly consists of nine members. Every member is asked to serve until next election. (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

Moreover, the decision-making process within the Baha'i assemblies are based on the principle of consultation which is a solution oriented dialog that occurs between the nine members of the assembly and with the rest of the community, with the aim to combine the diverse thoughts, ideas and opinion in order to achieve unity in diversity. As stated by the Founder of the Baha'i faith, Bahá'u'lláh:

Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest

through consultation. (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

However, the believe that through consultation one achieves the welfare and well-being of a society, does not intend to undermine the free opinion of individuals or suggest to implement uniformity. In fact, the clash of opinions is precisely what contributes to a sharper comprehension within the consultative arena. As the son of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. (The Bahá'í Faith – The website of the worldwide Bahá'í community n.d)

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the main objective of this thesis has been to offer new perspectives on good governance by challenging the assumption that the current form of competitive representative democracy is the best way to govern a society. The claim that is presented in the thesis, thus is, going back to parts of the Socratic idea of how to define a good ruler, while instead of governing a society with a top-down approach, the contrary is to be implemented and lastly by drawing some learnings from the worldwide Baha'i community and which guiding principles that are used to approach electoral and decision-making processes.

Since some of the inadequacies and limitations inherent in the current forms of democracy, as presented in the analyses part, lays in the root assumption that the human nature is capable of cooperation within the frames of contestation which is the main limitation to the current form of democracy. Thus, the theories of classical pluralism, agonism and deliberative democracy where analyzed and critique discussed on how they contribute to these inadequacies. Some

other guiding principles for addressing the inadequacies in democracy were looked at. Such as the Socratic idea, the bottom-up approach and the worldwide Baha'i community's guiding principles for democracy.

The Socratic idea that the best rulers are those who don't seek to possess power over others, is as argued before, a different principle from what the point of view of the current representative democracy. Moreover, Socrates meant that one should force these individuals to rule even though when they don't want it. However, I argue that those whom are picked to represent the people should indeed not do it from a place to control or possess power, rather they should do it from the deeper motivation which is to serve their fellow beings. That it is every representative's duty and responsibility to sacrifice their own will in order to serve the greater needs of the human race.

Nevertheless, these ideas evoke many questions such as: How do we know whom to vote for and based on what criteria? I argued that in order to, more or less, know who to vote for we have to know individuals and see them in their everyday life. In order to do so, politics will have to start from the grassroots up to the national or even global level. The current form of representative democracy uses a top-down approach while I argue that a bottom-up approach is what is needed as a reform of the current system. With a focus on community building, the base for an active collective life of a society is laid down. A definition of such a community could be different neighborhoods that are within a municipality. But even a municipality is too big for a change like this to occur from the grassroots. This, however, does not intend to replace political systems and order with civil-society and grassroots movements. What I am suggesting here is to bring down politics to the people so it actually represents the people.

Moreover, a certain criterion that would function as guiding principles for the voter could be applied. As the Baha'i community has proved to function under a set of criteria that is offered for each individual to take in consideration when they are ought to pick the representatives. The voters are suggested to look at qualities such as loyalty, selfless devotion, acute intellect, recognized ability and mature experience. However, it's hardly possible to know, for a certainty, who possess those qualities if one doesn't know the person they are voting for. Even then, people's intentions cannot be guaranteed. Thus what is required is 1) the strengthening of political implementation on the community level. Only in that way it is more possible to see how and if people's words go hand in hand with their actions. In fact, this

possibility does not exist in the current political system, thus the rise of suspicion and mistrust in politicians. 2) By bringing down the political arena to the communities, one shows that they trust in the capacity of the individuals, that through their own judgement and freewill they can, with pure motives, pick people whom best embodies the qualities to serve the nation and the human kind as a whole.

Therefore the conclusion is that by implementing the Socratic idea and the Baha'i guiding principles in a bottom-up political approach, the entire paradigm of representative democracy is then shifted from the competitive culture to a more inclusive solution oriented culture of humble learning.

I am aware that many questions are evoked for each suggestion and argument made in this thesis. Whenever anything new is suggested it has, on one hand to be examined and dissected and on the other to be scientifically tested and applied in the real world. Thus the rise of skepticism in forms of questions are a natural part of the process. However, skepticism without constructivism is just pessimism and apathy and could even lead to lack of vision.

It's my intention to pave the way for further research within the field of good governance and different reforms of the current democratic system. I want to suggest further research in regards to: 1) The worldwide Baha'i community as a model to be studied. 2) A theory that has a different assumption of the human nature. Perhaps even a development of a new theory. 3) Analyzing some other theories such as constructivism, elite theory, post-colonial theory or other forms of theory. 4) A new form of study with the combination of empirical (the positive approach) and normative methods.

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