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## Democratisation beyond the Crisis of Liberalism, Bringing Civil Society within the State

Philosophers, sociologists and political scientists may analyse political crises by looking at the relationship between the liberal and democratic pillars of liberal-democratic regimes. Social questioning of representation (abstention, apathy and protest) is a democratic response to the failure of the liberal pillar to democratise access to political power, therefore, the crisis of liberalism. M. K. Gandhi developed an alternative theory based on intercultural perspectives and on local, ethical communities. Through Boaventura de Sousa Santos' "epistemologies of the South", this article analyses how Gandhi's work can be mobilised to foster democratisation theory. The study contends that to overcome the crises, democratisation of the liberal pillar is both paramount and achievable with a new interplay of the state and civil society.

**Keywords:** civil society; crisis of liberalism; democratisation; epistemologies of the South; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

### Introduction

The transformation of liberal democratic regimes has been formulated as "post-democracy" (Crouch, 2004), "audience democracy" (Manin, 1997), "hybrid democracy" (Diamanti, 2014a, 2014b), and "counter-democracy" (Rosanvallon, 2008) amongst others. These analyses try to grasp the changing reality of liberal-democratic regimes challenged by political crises that are characterised by citizens' disaffection with politics and the subsequent drop in voter turnout, political apathy and increased detachment between representatives and their constituents. Following Fukuyama (1989, 1992) and Huntington (1996), these positions assume the notion that "democracy"

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is a top-down western intra-civilisational product and the most advanced regime type (Przeworski, 2010: 16).

Waves of protest emerged in the west in 2011, demonstrating against political crises using names such as the “*geração à rasca*,” “*indignados*” and the “Occupy” movements; Graeber contends that the aspiration of these movements is to radicalise democracy as the “revival of the revolutionary imagination that conventional wisdom has long since declared dead” (Graeber, 2013: introduction). Graeber insists that a transformation in the USA has been ongoing for decades, with the “collusion between government and financial institutions” leading to the deterioration of institutions in the fields of security, education, health and economics.<sup>1</sup> This paradigm represents what Santos defines as “low-intensity democracy”: one that “does not promote any social redistribution. This occurs alongside the dismantling of public policies, the conversion of social policies into compensatory, residual and stigmatizing measures, and the return of philanthropy as a form of solidarity not grounded in rights” (Santos, 2006: 41).

Against the neoliberal radicalisation of social inequalities, Graeber defends that democracy is not a western artefact, hoping for an inter-civilisational perspective able to go beyond the paradigm based on elections (see also Santos and Avritzer, 2005; Costantini, 2012). Onuma (2010) advocates an “inter-civilisational” perspective for international law; democratic theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to be approached with a similar perspective in order to integrate civilisations and cultures other than states and their elites in the definition of modern democratic canons. This kind of approach emerges strongly with the “epistemologies of the South” through which Santos (2012) starts by inquiring the universal validity of western political categories and echoes the demands of dialogue of non-western scholars and activists. A range of democratic demands emerges in various civilisational contexts, such as in Latin America’s intercultural and communitarian democracy (Villoro, 2007; Santos, 2010; Rivas, 2013) or African consensus democracy (Wiredu, 1998, 1999, 2007). This article focuses on one of the most complex Indian trajectories, Gandhi’s political thinking.

This work identifies the political crises as the crisis of liberalism (addressed in the first section) and acknowledges a comprehensive response in Gandhi’s political philosophy (discussed in the following two sections). Gandhi restructures the political dimension starting from the bottom-up

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<sup>1</sup> Dalton had already argued that “the present questioning of government often comes from those who strongly adhere to the democratic creed” (Dalton, 2004: 192).

and framing participatory politics where liberal values are expanded and based on duties and social service, starting from the local dimension. Santos' epistemologies of the South (in the fourth section) embarks on this and other rich political visions from a post-colonial perspective and opens contemporary political theory to redesign (fifth section) the relationship between the state and civil society by advocating an ecological thinking. The emerging democratisation theory advocates what the crises negates: participation and inclusion in the political sphere and expansion – as opposed to limitation – of participation by civil society within the state, that is to say, democratisation of the liberal constitutional pillar of liberal-democratic regimes.

### **The Crisis of Liberalism**

If the political crises concern democracy understood as the abbreviation in use to mean “liberal-democratic regimes”, it is a predicament to be addressed by two main theoretical traditions: liberalism and democracy. In modern Europe, liberalism emerged chronologically before democracy (Macpherson, 1964: Part 1; Sartori, 1993: 203-212) and the relationship between the two is controversial. For instance, Barber (2003: XXXIV) argues that “liberalism serves democracy badly if at all, and that the survival of democracy therefore depends on finding for it institutional forms that loosen its connection with liberal theory”. Zakaria (1997) instead maintains that liberalism validates democracy and that democracy without liberalism is undesirable. He defends that the greater the limitations that the liberal pillar is able to exercise over the democratic pillar, the greater the quality of a liberal democratic regime, similar to what was already affirmed by the famous trilateral commission report (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975).

Giovanni Sartori deftly elucidates the theoretical distinction between the liberal and democratic pillar, “liberalism is above all the technic of the limits of the State's power, while democracy is the introduction of popular power in the State” (Sartori, 1993: 209). Moreover, the two pillars also identify two spheres, the constitutional and the social, the former being assigned to liberalism (responsible for defining the form of the state) thereby regulating the role of democracy (as people's power in the state) and the latter being the domain of democracy in the social acceptance that regulates economic welfare and social equality.

There are two horizons of analysis in which the two pillars interplay – the political (institutional politics) and the social domain, which is the non-institutional sphere of human interaction regulated by formal and informal

politics.<sup>2</sup> In liberal-democratic regimes, the political is predominantly the sphere of liberalism and the social is principally the sphere of democracy, “democracy is more than liberalism in a social (and economic) sense; but it is not more than liberalism in the political sense” (Sartori, 1993: 210).<sup>3</sup> The political is not the space of equal power relationships but the space of the limit of the powers of the state (in defence of individual liberty).<sup>4</sup> The social is the sphere of democracy through the redistribution of welfare.

While citizen’s disaffection from politics, low voter turnout, and political apathy characterise the political crises, and since the political sphere is predominantly organised by the liberal pillar, the result is that the political crises are of greater concern to the liberal pillar rather than to the democratic pillar. The reasons for the crisis relate to the liberal restriction of democratic access (participation) to state power. The crisis consists of citizens viewing themselves as politically irrelevant within the liberal constitutional pillar, which therefore fails to underscore the principle of equality of access to power within the political sphere.<sup>5</sup> The welfare state arguably masked the lack of democracy in the political sphere with a greater redistribution (and democracy) in the social sphere. Moreover, mass parties granted a space of political interaction that obscured the lack of political participation (Mair, 2002), but the rise of neoliberalism shrank democratic social redistribution

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<sup>2</sup> Bobbio maintains that the democratisation of the liberal-constitutional pillar is one of the “unfulfilled promises of democracy precisely the fact that political democracy did not extend to society and did not transform into social democracy” in which people concerned by a decision deliberate about it and participate in taking it (Bobbio, 1985). This is the citizen structure, one of the six social structures identified by Santos within capitalist societies, each of which has its own law, power and epistemology: home-place, production, market, community, citizenship and world-space (Santos, 2002a: 353-416).

<sup>3</sup> The literature widely debates the range of the two pillars. Mény and Surel (2002) refer to constitutionalism and popular democracy; the former is concerned with the form of the state, the latter concerns people’s participation. It is the space of political action that, apart from elections, is external to the state and internal to civil society. Habermas refers to the informal role of civil society in the public sphere while state’s institutions are the pillar of the political system (Habermas, 1996). For Fukuyama (1992), liberalism corresponds to the rule of law and individual freedoms while democracy is the citizens’ right to share in political power by voting. Chatterjee refers to governmentality and popular sovereignty elaborating on a transition occurred “in the course of the twentieth century from a conception of democratic politics grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty to one in which democratic politics is shaped by governmentality” (Chatterjee, 2004: 4). For Chantal Mouffe this is the constitutive tension between liberty and equality that is non-reconcilable within the liberal-democratic regimes (Mouffe, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Sartori affirms: “As a political form, our democracy cannot be much more of a juridical order focused on a complex of techniques of liberty. But this is no small acquisition. Democracy reappears and affirms itself in historical reality in the wake of liberalism precisely because it receives from it the political structures that make it practicable” (Sartori, 1993: 211).

<sup>5</sup> Elections imply that the liberal pillar is legitimised through one single democratic exercise, and the crisis of liberalism shows increased dissatisfaction with the centrality of this form of legitimation.

and triggered the massive critical reading of the lack of democracy in the political sphere.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the predominance of liberal limits to political democracy emerged as an unresolved issue.

The crisis of liberalism also relates to a meta level that goes beyond the left-right divide. “[T]he left has advanced a social-cultural liberalism that promotes individual rights and equality of opportunity for self-expression, while the right has advocated an economic-political liberalism that champions the free market liberated from the constricting shackles of the bureaucratic state” (Milbank and Pabst, 2015; see also Freire, 2014: 124-125). The two liberalisms mutually reinforce each other and foster “economic-political individualism with bureaucratic-managerial collectivism and social-cultural atomisation” (Milbank and Pabst, 2015), and this erodes social bonds and makes society dependent on the market while reducing individual and social freedom of self-realisation. Liberal pluralism removes the question of truth and goodness from the public debate due to the potential intolerance and oppressiveness of related doctrines, which creates an ideological barrier towards positive liberty – including a spiritual dimension – and produces materialist reductionism. With this, liberalism enters a meta-crisis which is “the tendency at once to abstract from reality and to reduce everything to its bare materiality, leaving an irreducible *aporia* between human will and artifice, on the one hand, and unalterable laws of nature and history, on the other” (*ibidem*).

Before focusing on the crisis of liberalism as a lack of political participation in the political sphere, it is fitting to analyse the response given by Gandhi to the meta-crisis of liberalism as a materialist emphasis on power and wealth.

### **Gandhi’s Democratic Worldview**

Gandhi advocated a comprehensive view of life promoting a philosophy of inter-civilisation democratisation that he implemented against three oppositional forces: western colonialism, Muslim separatism and high caste Hindu communalisms such as *hindutva* – “hinduness”. Since *Hind Swaraj* (1938 [1909]), Gandhi promoted “true civilisation”, an ideal that is not attained and can only be fostered as an equilibrium between the *purusharthas*, the four Hindu purposes of life, which are *dharma* (ethics), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (passion) and *moksha* (spiritual liberation). Gandhi did not advocate

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<sup>6</sup> On neoliberalism, see Harvey (2007), and on neoliberal globalisation, see Santos (2002b, 2006). On the impact of neoliberal globalisation on democratic regimes, see Stokes (2001). For the Indian case, see Patnaik (2014).

an otherworldly life based on the pure spiritual search of *moksha*, but an equilibrium of wealth (and power) and passion under the aegis of the moral law of *dharma*. He acknowledged that contingency does not exhaust life, but rather is a part of it; therefore, the ultimate objective is otherworldly but must be obtained within this world. Gandhi underscored that the need for such equilibrium applies to civilisations besides individuals and from there the concept of *sarvodaya* (service, duty and welfare for all) emerged (Parel, 2003).

While liberal-democracy is centred on the right to vote, Gandhi maintained the primacy of individual duty to carry out one's personal and collective service. The service to society and living in harmony in the community, with nature and God, leads to personal *swaraj* (self-rule), or democratisation. The basic role of Gandhi's democratic idea is the moral agency of subjectivities, both the individual and the community, as opposed to an "aggregative system of self-interested individuals" (K. P. Mishra, 2012: 206-207), based on rights and in need of protection. Gandhi's democratic ideal starts with individual emancipation and leads to social emancipatory democratisation; in other words, emancipated and self-less individuals give rise to Gandhi's democratic worldview. Gandhi proposed a spiritual root for democracy; he re-establishes the linkage between liberty and equality through fraternity, an actively and politically constructed category that Skaria (2002: 956ff.) names "neighbourliness". We see a number of differences with liberalism: he "tried to practice, seriously and systematically, a modern religious politics that was more tolerant of difference and less tolerant of injustice than liberalism" (*ibidem*: 959).

Gandhi criticised western civilisation for having lost its own moral and spiritual values and for accentuating the centrality of wealth, power and passion. With western supremacy, power became the meter of civilisational strength; therefore, the west conquered the world and classified it on the power-scale based on violence and force (Parel, 2003).<sup>7</sup> Gandhi engaged in the Hindu-Muslim dialogue, advocating religious plurality and was opposed to *hindutva* as it was coupled with violence. Gandhi combined his Hindu worldview with western humanism (based on human rights, state secularism, equality, civic nationalism) opposing the loss of morality and spirituality.

Although the adoption of terms such as religion, religiosity and spirituality is open to controversial interpretation, Gandhi's idea of democracy

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<sup>7</sup> Gandhi's criticism of technology and development also related to the centrality of power and the alienation of the other spheres of life. This is the abyssal "logic of social classification, based on the monoculture of the naturalization of differences" (Santos, 2014: 173).

is secular and spiritual without being conventional in the sense of any religion.<sup>8</sup>

### A Short Sketch of Gandhi's Political Significance

Gandhi advocated democracy in the political sphere in a spirit that partially inhabits the “biggest democracy” in the world and its constitution (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2006: 20-31; Gupta, 2009, 2013: 45-67; Prasad, 2011). Gandhi was critical of liberal democracy (Pantham, 1983) and insisted on a grass-roots and participatory democratic vision integrated with the philosophical and civilisational account that was highly cohesive with his social and political engagement (Bilgrami, 2002; see also Suhru, 2005).<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi deconstructed the supposed universalism of western civilisation (Parekh, 1989: 208-209; Hardiman, 2003: 71) and engaged in a two-fronted struggle, one against colonial rule (for the good of coloniser and colonised)<sup>10</sup> and the other advocating an alternative democratisation of India entailing political and moral independence (H 5-5-1946).<sup>11</sup> He imbued his dual struggle against western political and cultural hegemony as well as against the hegemony of India's own traditions of caste and gender discrimination and against the partition of India and Pakistan with a strong inter-religious and inter-cultural spirit. He focused on individual and community self-reliance, autonomy and government, neither centred on representation nor on strong state institutions, in other words against the western strength of the liberal-constitutional pillar as opposed to the democratic one. The opposition to western civilisation and its regime type was also an ideological instrument in the struggle for independence, providing strength to

<sup>8</sup> As an example, Skaria and Bilgrami define Gandhi in opposite but not contradictory terms. Skaria maintains that Gandhi preaches religious politics while for Bilgrami, Gandhi's vision is secular. Both are right because they convene on the assumption that Gandhi substantiated his moral concept of democracy through spiritual as opposed to materialistic foundations, besides it being universally inclusive regardless of the religious faith of individuals, therefore secular. They also agree that Gandhi refused liberal secularism that relegates the spiritual dimension to the private sphere, and therefore disqualifying the proper root of what Gandhi considered the democratic ideal, *swaraj* or self-rule.

<sup>9</sup> Gandhi the philosopher-activist of alternative civilisation is one of the “Gandhis” that Ashis Nandy (2000) did only partially account for. This Gandhi is perhaps less well-known when compared with the others but no less important for an ecological alternative to capitalism and colonialism.

<sup>10</sup> Gandhi engaged with the British to reconcile their civilisation with their own morality and spirituality, and his intent was that coloniser and colonised could mutually support each other in this exercise. This spirit permeates the message of religious authorities such as Pope Francis. See for instance *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Gandhi's Journals articles are cited hereafters in short as follow: *Harijan* (Gandhi, 1956): H DD-MM-YYYY; *Young India* (Gandhi, 1931): YI DD-MM-YYYY. See also *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, English version 100 volumes (Gandhi, 1994). All these key texts are available online via the Gandhi Heritage Portal ([www.gandhiheritageportal.org](http://www.gandhiheritageportal.org)).

the Indian people by reinforcing civilisational self-consciousness (Parekh, 1989: 208-209; Hardiman, 2003: 71). The struggle for India's independence was for Gandhi just part of a longer journey towards democracy,<sup>12</sup> a very demanding moral conception, *swaraj*, which included a worldview leading to the independence and emancipation of the individual within the emancipation of the community.

Gandhi did not work to build an alternative cultural hegemony, rather he shaped a new peripheral and inclusionary democratic vision discordant with state centrality and violence, which he considered a dehumanising and irresponsible organisation (Parekh, 1989: 28, 110-111).<sup>13</sup> He rejected both the colonisers and their political regime and contrasted the idea that a post-colonial India would be guided by a western-like Indian elite to replace its British counterpart (Gandhi, 1938: 26; Parekh, 1989: 113). Gandhi was designing a post-capitalist society where real democracy (*purna swaraj* – complete or full self-rule) could be achieved on the horizon of an ideal moral state, *Ramraj*, or the state ruled by higher morality and not by legal coercive power (Pantham, 1983; see also Pandey, 1988; Skaria, 2011).<sup>14</sup>

As for the idea of *Ramraj*, Gandhi's political message was on the horizon of utopia when he proposed a federation of 700,000 village republics in India, a message in response to the real political challenges of his time and peoples.<sup>15</sup> He also defended liberal values, he strongly supported and used the free press for social and political struggle, and maintained that public opinion is the tool to reduce the abuses of political regimes (Jain, 2009: 36). He was a strenuous defender of minority rights against the dictatorship of the majority and defended individual freedom, maintaining that “[u]nder democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded”

<sup>12</sup> *Satyagraha* (resistance based on the insistence on the force of Truth) is the theory and set of positive actions of Gandhi's non-violent civil disobedience (Gandhi, 1950 [1928]). It is a practice of protest and political struggle as well as work to educate the masses to escape people's “voluntary servitude” (Boétie, 2011 [1576]).

<sup>13</sup> “Gandhi was deeply uneasy with the modern state. It was abstracted from society, centralized, bureaucratic, obsessed with homogeneity, and suffused with the spirit of violence” (Parekh, 2001: 99).

<sup>14</sup> “‘Swaraj’ for Gandhi is just equivalent with ‘Ramraj’ in which he argues that the moral authority and power are the basic foundations of the sovereignty of the people” (Pandey, 1988: 41).

<sup>15</sup> One of the main criticisms made of Gandhi's democracy is its adequacy on a smaller scale but not for modern cities. Parekh clarifies this point in the following: “Gandhi's emphasis on the human need for roots and the value of small communities is well taken, but his local communities are too isolated and self-contained to be realistic and too parochial and self-absorbed to avoid becoming moral prisons. [...] Gandhi was too realistic not to see this and kept modifying his views” (Parekh, 2001: 121-122). The small scale was not only relevant for the great majority of the Indian population, it was also the *locus* for the re-foundation of intercivilisational democratic theory, beyond the village. *Swaraj* is Gandhi's core democratic value; therefore, Pantham (1983) identifies *swaraj* with participatory democracy.



(YI 3-2-1922 see also H 1-2-1942 and H 14-7-1946), but in strong connection with the independence of the community (H 27-5-1939), a reconciliation between individual and community (Gandhi, 1938: 26; Joseph, 2013: 485).

Starting from the *Ashram* communities where he lived, Gandhi preached and practiced a new educational model that combined theoretical and practical learning with the aim to develop the intellectual as well as the civic and communitarian skills of the pupils (H 10-3-1946 and H 2-2-1947). By basing democracy on people and community, as opposed to state and power, he advocated a minimal state along with a radical devolution and decentralisation of political power to the local dimension (Kumar, 2004). In this view, the democratic community is auto-centred and advocates the virtuous growth of the individuals through education and collective work.

Gandhi's economic vision was characterised by a small-scale, cooperative, sustainable and anti-capitalist system of production with a basic level of welfare system built into the local community.<sup>16</sup> In the small scale he saw the condition for "abolishing of the eternal conflict between capital and labour" (Gandhi, 1945: 20), where possession and accumulation could cease to be an objective and become a mere instrument of subsistence. Consequently, he preached that representative power, however limited as compared with the western model, grounded from the bottom-up, is to be handled in conformity with the people's will (YI 1-12-1927) and people's autonomy must remain the main political source of power. He was resolutely against political bureaucracy and contrary to party centralism; shortly before his assassination he proposed the dissolution of the Congress Party in order to reinforce the network of civic associations engaged in constructive work (Gandhi, 1945) to perform the social service necessary to sustain local communities.<sup>17</sup> Parties, in Gandhi's view, contributed to the creation of elites, divided society and state, which undermined the participatory characteristics of politics, and were useless in the political dimension that is most important for him, the local one (Jain, 2009: 42-46; similarly for Olivetti, 2013).

Against the British colonial dichotomy of modern-civilised vs. retrograde-uncivilised, Gandhi worked at the empirical level redefining the civilisational discourse with the objective of *swaraj* (Prem Anand Mishra, 2012: 18). He advocated solid alternatives to the western notions of progress and

<sup>16</sup> Gandhi's basic texts on economy include the *Constructive Programme* (1945) and *Village Swaraj* (1962) whereas Gandhi's economist, J. C. Kumarappa, elaborated on the *Economy of Permanence* (1948). For analyses see, among others, Ishii (2001) and Dasgupta (2003).

<sup>17</sup> This point resonates with Weil (1950) statement for the abolition of political parties because they forbid politics to follow truth and justice for the sake of partisan interest and power. Gandhi express the same view in *Hind Swaraj* (Chap. V) and in the political testament in which he advocated the dismissal of Congress party (H 15-2-1948).

development and to liberal-democracy as a regime. Although the political trajectory of Independent India largely evaded these projects, Gandhi's political philosophy represents a powerful openness opposed to the hegemony of Eurocentric political philosophies, and it gains much relevance if amplified within an intercultural approach. The epistemologies of the South present a set of theoretical and methodological tools that magnify the value of Gandhi's and other democratic perspectives as a response to the crisis of liberalism. The relevance of the epistemologies of the South in terms of democratic theory, with a focus on Gandhi's participatory perspective, will now be explored.

### **The Epistemologies of the South and Democratic Perspectives**

The "epistemologies of the South" are "a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (Santos, 2014: X). They take over the emancipatory force of Gandhi's theory as a critical account of the liberal-democratic theory. They tackle the theory of democracy to incorporate liberalism only as an emancipatory force rather than a disciplinary and normative defence of negative liberties.

Santos departs from a critical account of "abyssal thinking" or the rationality developed by western modernity with the colonial empires and based on radical exclusions (Santos, 2007). The epistemologies of the South are a theoretical and methodological device to elaborate an "ecological thinking" as opposed to abyssal thinking. Dialogue enables three elements to become mutually intelligible: the various positive notions of liberty, specific concepts and practices of democracy, and ways to implement the sharing of power. The "theory of intercultural translations" (Santos, 2014: 212-236), based on diatopical hermeneutics (see also Panikkar, 1982, 2000; Santos, 2008), fosters mutual understanding with respect to two extremes: universalism and relativism. The translation does not imply absence of conflict but rather an effort toward the radicalisation of mutual recognition with no aim to create an alternative all-encompassing political theory, but rather to amplify different voices committed to accept the absence of general theories.

An inter-civilisational approach is advocated within the state, looking for political-cultural diversity within and acknowledging political cultures without. While western-centric thinkers divide politics from civilisation and culture and state from society (see for instance, Huntington, 1996: 44), Gandhi and Santos have the opposite perspective; for them, state and society, politics and culture are strictly interlinked in view of an alternative

democratic grammar to the crisis of liberalism. Theory and practice of democracy concern political, social, economic and cultural spaces of relationship, when combined, shape the organisational form to govern society and distribute powers within it. The World Social Forum (WSF), of which Santos is one of the founding members (Santos, 2005a, 2006), resonates with Gandhi's democratic perspectives. It is a space to practice intercultural translations and to respond to the crisis of liberalism. On the one hand, it recognises the rising challenge of global issues by advocating that solutions cannot be domestic; on the other hand, it contests the division between state and civil society by advocating a different interaction among the two.

Santos maintains that the separation of state and civil society corresponds to the separation of the political from the economic, which consolidated capitalist social relationships by neutralising their economic exploitation and the revolutionary potential of modernity, thereby limiting the emancipatory scope of democracy (Santos, 1995: 415). Therefore, the dualism of state and civil society needs to be undone to foster a bottom-up creation of shared meanings by restoring value to civil society and questioning the civilisational monologue that produced it. Kothari advocates that the dualism is one of the foundations of the limit of current democratic theory:

We need a new theory of democracy that can comprehend the incapacity of existing institutional and ideological models [...] We need a democratic theory that accepts the great diversity of human situations and yet provides coherence to them through an active political process, and opens up new and creative spaces within the framework of civil society while simultaneously restructuring the state to realise these ends. [...] We need a theory of democracy that seeks to redirect the attention of intellectuals and social and political activists to the institution of the state; a theory that attempts to civilise the state and to make governance more humane than has been so far. (Kothari, 2005: 14-15)

Reinventing democratic theory implies envisaging forms of “high intensity democracy” (Santos, 2010). The path includes a new relationship between representation and participation through political ecological thinking of different democratic ideas and demands. Institutional and non-institutional politics must engage with each other to expand the democratic interplay, “representative [democracy] is dominated by political parties, and participatory [democracy] is dominated by social movements and the neighbouring association, etc. If there is no political articulation between the two, it is not possible to articulate representative and participatory democracy” (*ibidem*: 70).

### From Crises to Inclusion

The bridging of state and civil society, institutions, parties and movements implies two major actions-objectives. First, decentralise and devolve power to grassroots politics in order to re-centre it on the themes promoted by civil society and its actors, and, second, undermine the conditions of self-reproduction of political elitism, thus strengthening a people-centred participatory approach to representation. This is achieved through the reformulation of political leadership, its accountability, rotation and representability (its limits, competences, interaction-participatory approach) in order to shorten the gap with people, re-prioritise the political agenda, and go beyond the demagogy of the electoral politics (Gianolla, 2017). Such an approach is characterised by institutional commitment to participation without monopolising it. Representatives, as facilitators, translate and stimulate people's initiatives within state infrastructures with a bottom-up approach because, "having a representative is, or ought to be, only the beginning of citizen input into governmental decision-making" (Wiredu, 2007: 159). The state thus becomes the main player of horizontal power redistribution whereas civil society and its organisations would see their share of power increased within the liberal pillar.

Both the global South and North provide several good practices of participation that can be strengthened in the interplay with the state's politics, both at local and national level. Listed here are just four examples, the first being the participatory politics of the Indian state of Kerala, the decentralisation and devolution of government to the local communities based on state's initiative (Heller and Isaac, 2005; Heller, Harilal and Chaudhuri, 2007; Ramakantan, 2009). The second is the grassroots work of thousands of social movements dedicated to the local, and often rural, struggle for democratisation, such as the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS – Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) in Rajasthan. The MKSS is committed to the extension of the state's funding programmes, administrative transparency, and local development, and interacts in the democratisation of the liberal pillar – such as with the enactment of the Right to Information Act (Roy, 2000, 2014; Dey, 2014). The third example relates to the "active citizenship" initiatives as they are emerging in Italy, characterised by their being informal, autonomous, oriented to policies and not politics (nor elections), and for the primacy of making as opposed to demanding (Moro, 2012, 2015, 2016). The fourth example is "participatory budgeting", as developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil since the 1980s and now spread to thousands of cities around the world (Santos, 1998, 2005b; Sintomer *et al.*, 2012; Sintomer, Herzberg and Allegretti, 2013; Allegretti, 2014; Dias, 2014).

These are just a few instances of many different participatory practices<sup>18</sup> showing how civil society may interact very differently with the state (see also Avritzer, 2012). While active citizenship advocates complete independence, participatory budgeting is increasingly supported by local governments, and questions are thus raised as to the role of the representatives, autonomy of the process and degrees of participation. Grassroots movement such as the MKSS are politically independent from parties and state and aim to stimulate their democratisation whereas in Kerala participation is part of the state's regional framework. This shows that diversity of practices is fundamental because any single proposal standardised within liberal representative regimes would probably be undemocratic – if possible at all. There must be an intercultural translation to foster reflection on representation, participation, leadership, the role of the state, the role of parties, and so on.

### Conclusion

With the global diffusion of liberal democracy as a regime form and the challenges raised by neoliberal globalisation, the crisis of liberalism affects the world.<sup>19</sup> The “serendipity effect” of reading Gandhi in light of the epistemologies of the South has intercultural implications for a philosophical, sociological and political analysis of how a theory of democracy needs to reconsider its relationship with the social subjectivities and their worldviews. Gandhi advocated a comprehensive politics of life that exceeds the pluralism and tolerance inscribed in western liberalism; he intended to make India an example of this multidimensional democratic vision. Europe and the West today face many similarities with Gandhi's India: on the one side of the aisle is a multipolar front of political, religious and social activists and professionals wishing to pull the future of the continent and its politics towards extreme ideas of religion, nation, economy and people. On the other side is an equally diverse front of those who defend intercultural dialogue in search of advanced social relationships based on the dignity of people and peoples. The challenge for the latter group is to implement intra- and intercultural translations as the instruments to deliver a collective and diversified front of responses, recurrently under scrutiny and undergoing constant reshaping that is able to provide answers to the multifaceted

<sup>18</sup> More examples can be found in the website [participedia.net](http://participedia.net) (Fung and Warren, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Manent (2014) focuses to the crisis of liberalism concerning globalisation. He maintains that liberalism was historically the condition of European domination in the world and that globalisation is the last form of such domination (new colonialism) which is today in crises because the European economies no longer can dominate in the world market (see also Gianolla, 2010).

meaning of democracy. Being an ongoing, always changing and never-ending enterprise, democratisation rather than democracy is the best definition for it. Democratisation implies bringing the democratic pillar into the liberal constitutional pillar, which in turn demands bringing civil society within the state through a range of participatory forms.

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***Democratizar para além da crise do liberalismo: trazer a sociedade civil para o Estado***

Os filósofos, sociólogos e cientistas políticos podem estudar as crises políticas através da análise da relação entre os pilares liberais e democráticos dos regimes democráticos liberais. O questionamento social da representação (abstenção, apatia e protesto) é uma resposta democrática ao fracasso do pilar liberal em democratizar o acesso ao poder político, e daí a crise do liberalismo. M. K. Gandhi desenvolveu uma teoria alternativa baseada em perspectivas interculturais e em comunidades éticas locais. Sob a perspectiva das “epistemologias do Sul” de Boaventura de Sousa Santos, este artigo analisa a forma como o trabalho de Gandhi pode ser mobilizado para promover a teoria da democratização. O estudo defende que, para superar as crises, a democratização do pilar liberal é não só essencial, como concretizável através de uma nova interação entre Estado e sociedade civil.

**Palavras-chave:** crise do liberalismo; democratização; epistemologias do Sul; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948); sociedade civil.

***Démocratiser au-delà de la crise du libéralisme: mener la société civile vers l'État***

Les philosophes, sociologues et scientifiques politiques peuvent étudier les crises politiques par le truchement de l'analyse de la relation entre les piliers libéraux et démocratiques des régimes démocratiques libéraux. Le questionnement social de la représentation (abstention, apathie et protestation) est une réponse démocratique à l'échec du pilier libéral de démocratisation de l'accès au pouvoir politique, et dès lors, à la crise du libéralisme. M. K. Gandhi a développé une théorie alternative reposant sur des perspectives interculturelles et sur des communautés éthiques locales. Partant de la perspective des “épistémologies du Sud” de Boaventura de Sousa Santos, cet article cherche à savoir comment le travail de Gandhi peut être mobilisé en sorte à promouvoir la théorie de la démocratisation. L'étude défend que, pour dépasser les crises, la démocratisation du pilier libéral est non seulement essentielle mais qu'elle peut être concrétisée grâce à une nouvelle interaction entre l'État et la société civile.

**Mots-clés:** crise du libéralisme; démocratisation; épistémologies du Sud; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948); société civile.