



Cristiano Gianolla

GANDHIAN DEMOCRATISATION: AN ACCOUNT AGAINST POLITICAL COLONISATION

Ph. D. thesis on Democracy in the XXI Century
In co-tutelage with the University of Coimbra and Sapienza University of Rome
Directed by Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor Giovanni Ruocco and Professor José Manuel Mendes
Presented at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra.

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Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Professor Giovanni Ruocco

Professor José Manuel Mendes

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Author

Cristiano Gianolla

Supervisors

Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (University of Coimbra)
Prof. Gianni Ruocco (Sapienza - University of Rome)
Prof. José Manuel de Oliveira Mendes (University of Coimbra)

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To Antonio Gianolla and Ivana Mezzullo.

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Palavras-chave e sinopse (Português)

Palavras-chave: Colonialismo-Político, movimento-partido, linha abissal política, democratização da democracia, democratização Gandhiana, swaraj, descentralização, participação, democracia intercivilisational, epistemologias do sul, crise do liberalismo político, populismo, Aam Aadmi Party, Movimento 5 Stelle.

A presente investigação crítica da teoria democrática, parte da perspectiva que muito do que é considerado geralmente aceite, conhecido, inevitável ou factual não fica gravado em pedra e que a democracia (teórica e prática) deve fortalecer a sua capacidade de inclusão desde a base para democratizar-se. As práticas e as perspectivas realistas dos regimes da democracia liberal estão amplamente na base do conceito dominante de democracia; este trabalho desafia-as, questionando categorias como povo, representação, elite e populismo. Esta pesquisa analisa a relação entre liberalismo e democracia e a ‘crise do liberalismo político’ emergindo como causa de várias formas de opressão e de exclusão, que a teoria democrática tradicional condena mas sem conseguir resolver. A pesquisa questiona o entendimento do cânone democrático liberal como um sistema de ‘colonialismo-político’. Este consiste num fracionamento estrutural da sociedade entre um limitado número de representantes e um avultado número de representados, tendo estes um reduzido poder político em comparação com o dos representantes.

Este estudo questiona o carácter histórico, filosófico, social e político do colonialismo-político e explora a alternativa proposta por M. K. Gandhi. A proposta civilizacional de Gandhi desafia o colonialismo-político e propõe um paradigma participativo, descentralizado e baseado no dever numa visão holística da sociedade. A alternativa de Gandhi à hegemonia de potência e à separação estrutural entre representantes e representados procura promover condições relacionais da política, associando a riqueza, ética, paixão e espiritualidade.

O assassinato de Gandhi abreviou drasticamente as condições e o perímetro de implementação prática das suas ideias democráticas, apesar de serem fortemente estimulantes. Embora a consolidação de uma alternativa geral da teoria da democratização – que permita enfrentar o colonialismo-político – pareça ser impossível e indesejável; um número de ativistas, movimentos e organizações sociopolíticas estão a proporcionar porções

de inovação relevantes para investigar a democratização. As epistemologias do sul – elaboradas por Boaventura de Sousa Santos – constituem um conjunto de investigações teóricas e metodológicas que pesquisam, valorizam e traduzem as ‘emergências’ fragmentadas que lutam contra o colonialismo-político. Este trabalho correlaciona, criticamente, as lutas intelectuais e políticas para a democratização da democracia, através da ação das epistemologias do sul, avaliando e comparando os seus sucessos e fracassos.

O trabalho empírico tem como foco os ‘movimentos-partido’ que são forças políticas que emergem da sociedade civil e que participam na política representativa. Os seus discursos simbolizam posturas críticas contra o colonialismo-político, e apresentam práticas para a integração da sociedade através de processos participativos, que dialogam com a estrutura representativa. O material etnográfico recolhido, (no total de onze meses), foi produzido com dois movimentos-partido, o *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP – Partido da Pessoa Comum) indiano e o *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S – Movimento 5 Estrelas) italiano. A recolha de dados qualitativos foi aplicada através da metodologia reflexiva desde a base dos movimentos-partido para o nível nacional (e no caso de M5S a nível europeu). A análise foca seis categorias: povo, estrutura-liderança, onda ética, participação, horizontalidade-inclusão e linha política.

O AAP herdou a abordagem Gandhiana de *India Against Corruption*, uma campanha nacional liderada pelo ativista social Anna Hazare, que Arvind Kejriwal apoiou até 2012, quando fundou o AAP com outros ativistas sociais. O M5S emergiu através da carreira do comediante Beppe Grillo e do especialista da internet Gianroberto Casaleggio (1954-2016). A ‘democratização Gandhiana’ aqui apresentada é só uma, bastante parcial, de muitas outras possibilidades (até eventualmente contraditórias) que formam a herança rica e multifacetada de Gandhi, é, uma categorização analítico-perspéctica aplicada à comparação. Enquanto Gandhi propôs uma abordagem sociopolítica estrutural, alternativa, vasta e metafisicamente fundada ao colonialismo-político, AAP e M5S tentam relacionar-se com o sistema existente para democratizá-lo. Apesar de o M5S não fazer nenhuma referência estrutural à teoria de Gandhi, partilha largamente o discurso de democratização do AAP. A riqueza desta tese surge da tradução sul-norte proporcionada pelas epistemologias do sul entre a alternativa civilizacional de Gandhi e os fragmentos de inovação que emergem do discurso político experimental dos movimentos-partido.

Parole chiave e sinossi (Italiano)

Parole chiave: Colonialismo-politico, movimento-partito, linea abissale politica, democratizzazione della democrazia, democratizzazione Gandhiana, swaraj, decentramento, partecipazione, democrazia interciviltà, epistemologie del sud, crisi del liberalismo politico, populismo, Aam Aadmi Party, Movimento 5 Stelle.

La presente indagine critica della teoria della democrazia parte dalla prospettiva che molto di ciò che è ampiamente considerato come noto, inevitabile o fattuale, non è scritto nella roccia e che la democrazia (teorica e pratica) deve rafforzare la sua capacità di inclusione partendo dal basso per poter democratizzare se stessa. Le pratiche e le prospettive realiste dei regimi democratico liberali sono largamente alla base del concetto tradizionale di democrazia; questo lavoro le mette in discussione questionando categorie, come il popolo, la rappresentanza, l'élite ed il populismo. Esso analizza il rapporto tra liberalismo e democrazia e la 'crisi del liberalismo politico' che evince come radice causale di diverse forme di oppressione e di esclusione che la teoria democratica tradizionale condanna senza essere in grado di affrontare. La ricerca questiona la comprensione del canone liberal democratico in quanto sistema di 'colonialismo-politico'. Esso consiste in un frazionamento strutturale della società tra i pochi rappresentanti e i molti rappresentati, in cui questi ultimi hanno un potere politico molto limitato rispetto ai primi.

Lo studio indaga il carattere storico, filosofico, sociale e politico del colonialismo-politico ed esplora l'alternativa proposta da M. K. Gandhi. La proposta civilizzazionale di Gandhi affronta il colonialismo-politico e fornisce un paradigma partecipativo, decentrato e basato sul dovere in una visione olistica della società. L'alternativa di Gandhi all'egemonia di potenza e alla separazione strutturale tra rappresentanti e rappresentati favorisce le condizioni relazionali della politica, che conciliano la ricchezza, l'etica, la passione e la spiritualità.

L'assassinio di Gandhi ha drasticamente ridotto le condizioni e il perimetro di applicazione pratica delle sue idee democratiche; tuttavia esse sono fortemente stimolanti. Mentre il consolidamento di una teoria generale alternativa di democratizzazione - in grado di affrontare il colonialismo-politico - sembra impossibile e indesiderabile, un certo numero di attivisti, movimenti e organizzazioni socio-politiche stanno fornendo porzioni di innovazione

rilevante per indagare la democratizzazione. Le epistemologie del sud – elaborate da Boaventura de Sousa Santos – sono un insieme di indagini teoriche e metodologiche che cercano, valorizzano e traducono le ‘emergenze’ frammentate che lottano contro il colonialismo-politico. Mobilitando le epistemologie del sud, il lavoro si impegna in modo critico con le lotte intellettuali e politiche per democratizzare la democrazia valutando e confrontando i loro successi ed i loro fallimenti.

Il lavoro empirico si concentra sui ‘movimenti-partito’ che sono forze politiche emergenti dalla società civile e che partecipano alla politica rappresentativa. I loro discorsi simbolizzano posizioni critiche contro il colonialismo-politico e propongono delle pratiche per il coinvolgimento della società nei processi partecipativi, che dialogano con la struttura rappresentativa. Il materiale etnografico raccolto (in un totale di undici mesi) è stato prodotto con due movimenti-partito, l’*Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP – Partito della Persona Comune) indiano ed il *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) italiano. La raccolta di dati qualitativi con una metodologia riflessiva è stata applicata dalla base dei movimenti-partito al livello nazionale (ed europeo nel caso del M5S). L’analisi si concentra su sei categorie: popolo, struttura-leadership, ondata etica, partecipazione, orizzontalità-inclusione e linea-politica.

AAP ha ereditato l’approccio Gandhiano di *India Against Corruption*, una campagna nazionale guidata dall’attivista sociale Anna Hazare, che Arvind Kejriwal ha sostenuto fino al 2012, quando ha fondato AAP con altri attivisti sociali. Il M5S emerge attraverso la combinazione della carriera del comico-attivista Beppe Grillo e dello specialista internet Gianroberto Casaleggio (1954-2016). La ‘democratizzazione Gandhiana’ qui elaborata è solo una, molto parziale, delle molteplici possibilità (anche contraddittorie) che formano l’eredità ricca e sfaccettata di Gandhi; è una categorizzazione analitico prospettica applicata alla comparazione. Mentre Gandhi propose un approccio socio-politico strutturale, alternativo, vasto e metafisicamente fondato al colonialismo-politico, AAP e M5S tentano di impegnarsi con il sistema esistente, al fine di democratizzarlo. Oltre al fatto che il M5S non fa alcun riferimento strutturale diretto alla teoria di Gandhi, esso condivide gran parte del discorso di democratizzazione con AAP. La ricchezza della tesi nasce dalla traduzione sud-nord proporzionata dalle epistemologie del sud tra l’alternativa civilizzazionale di Gandhi ed i frammenti di innovazione emergenti dal discorso politico sperimentale dei movimenti-partito.

Acronyms

AAP	<i>Aam Aadmi Party</i> (Party of the Common Person)
ANC	African National Congress
BJP	<i>Bharatiya Janata Party</i> (Indian People's Party)
CAQDA	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CES	Centre for Social Studies (University of Coimbra)
CGS	Centre for Gandhian Studies (University of Rajasthan)
CM	Chief Minister (head of the executive of the Indian states or union territories)
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
EZLN	<i>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional</i> (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)
FONDACA	<i>Fondazione per la Cittadinanza Attiva</i> (Foundation for Active Citizenship)
H	Harijan (newspaper edited and co-authored by Gandhi)
IAC	India Against Corruption
ICS	Indian Civil Service
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRS	Indian Revenue Service
KIGS	Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj
M5S	<i>MoVimento 5 Stelle</i> (5 Star Movement)
MKSS	<i>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan</i> (Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants)

MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly (Indian states or union territories)
MP	Member of Parliament (in reference to India it is used for the Union parliament)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NCPRI	National Campaign for People's Right to Information
PAC	Political Affairs Committee (AAP internal body)
PM	Prime Minister (head of the executive of the Government of India)
RTI	Right to Information
RTR	Right to Recall
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
SC	Scheduled Caste (also known as Untouchables, <i>Dalit</i> or <i>Harijan</i> by Gandhi)
ST	Scheduled Tribes (also known as <i>Adivasi</i> , Tribals or indigenous)
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences
YI	Young India (newspaper edited and co-authored by Gandhi)
WSF	World Social Forum

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Introduction

Synopsis of the main ideas

The present critical inquiry of the theory of democracy starts from the perspective that much of what is widely considered as known, unavoidable or factual is not written in stone and that democracy (theory and practice) must strengthen its inclusive capacity starting from the grassroots in order to democratise itself. Realist practices and perspectives of liberal democratic regimes largely inform the mainstream concept of democracy. This study challenges them questioning categories such as people, representation, elite and populism. It analyses the relationship of liberalism and democracy and the 'crisis of political liberalism' emerging as a root-condition of forms of oppression and exclusion that mainstream democratic theory condemns without being able to tackle. This research questions the understanding of the liberal democratic canon for being a system of 'political-colonialism', which consists of a structural fractioning of society between few representatives and many represented where the latter have very limited political power with respect to the former.

This study examines the historical, philosophical, social and political grain of political-colonialism and investigates the alternative proposed by M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi's civilisational proposal tackles political-colonialism and provides a participatory, decentralised and duty-based paradigm founded on the holistic vision of society. Gandhi's alternative to hegemonic power and the structural separation between the representatives and the represented fosters the relational condition of politics combining wealth, ethics, passion and spirituality.

Gandhi's assassination drastically abridged the conditions necessary for the practical implementation of his democratic Ideas. Despite this however, they remain strongly stimulating. While the consolidation of an alternative general theory of democratisation, that is able to contend with political-colonialism, seems impossible and undesirable, a number of socio-political activists, movements and organisations are providing portions of innovation that are making it relevant to investigate democratisation. The epistemologies of the South – as elaborated on by Boaventura de Sousa Santos – are a set of theoretical and methodological inquiries that search, valorise and translate the fragmented 'emergences' that are struggling against political-colonialism. By mobilising the epistemologies of the South this study critically

engages with the intellectual and political struggles to democratise democracy and assesses and compares their achievements and failures.

The empirical work of this study focuses on ‘party-movements’ – political forces emerging from civil society and participating in representative politics. Their discourses symbolise critical stances against political-colonialism. Additionally, they present practices for the engagement of society in participatory processes dialoguing with the representative framework. The collected ethnographic evidence (gathered in a total of eleven months) was accomplished by analysing two party-movements, the Indian *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP – Party of the Common Person) and the Italian *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S – 5 Star Movement). Qualitative data were collected through a reflexive methodology from the grassroots of party-movements on up to the national level (and EU in the case of the M5S). The analysis focuses on six categories: people, leadership-structure, ethical wave, participation, horizontality-inclusion and political line.

The AAP has inherited the Gandhian approach of the group India Against Corruption, a national campaign led by the social activist Anna Hazare. Belonging to this campaign was Arvind Kejriwal, who supported it until 2012 when he left to found the AAP with other social activists. The M5S emerged through the combination of the careers of the comedian-activist Beppe Grillo and the internet specialist Gianroberto Casaleggio (1954-2016).

The ‘Gandhian democratisation’ elaborated on here is only one, partial possibility out of the many (even mutually contradictory) possibilities that emerge from Gandhi’s rich and multifaceted inheritance. It is an analytical prospective categorisation that is applied to the comparison. While Gandhi propounded a comprehensive, metaphysically founded, socio-political structural alternative to political-colonialism, the AAP and the M5S attempt to engage with the existing system in order to democratise it. Besides the fact that the M5S makes no direct structural reference to Gandhi’s theory, it shares much of its democratisation discourse with the AAP. The richness of the thesis arises from the South-North translation proportionated by the epistemologies of the South between Gandhi’s civilisational alternative and the fragments of innovation emerging from the experimental political discourse of party-movements.

Democra-cy|tisation

This study concentrates on a theoretical object that is very well known and at the same time it is very controversial. What is democracy? To provide a general answer to this question in the introduction is an explanatory exercise of the critical character of this work.

Democracy has no clear definition because the exercise of defining it undermines the very principle subtending it. The reason being that democracy can only be defined by accepting the exclusion of other definitions of democracy, and by accepting the exclusion it contradicts the principle that substantiates it. By principle, democracy is undefinable. This implies that democracy creates a number of contrasts and clashes between those who propose its definitions and these become problematic when they have to (democratically) mutually accept each other. Therefore, all systems, structures or regimes so called 'democratic' are substantially un-democratic in that they exclude other forms and concepts of democracy. This sequence, which starts with the attempt to define democracy and attain the acknowledgement of the impossibility to define it, unveils a fundamental element that is ontologically inbuilt in democracy: inclusion. That is, if the lack of democracy corresponds to exclusion, then the presence of democracy corresponds to inclusion, but inclusion and exclusion are two extremes while reality and theory are always in-between. The fact that a total inclusion is tangentially unachievable makes democracy undefinable and, at the same time, makes democratisation the true centre of political theory. It is a fact that no system, structure or regime is perfectly democratic or fully inclusive. All are perfectible and constantly under revision, as are the theoretical frameworks behind them. To this theoretical proposition, we need to add the unpredictable variability brought by the subjectivities that define and implement democracy (and the relationships among them). This factor multiplies the causes and conditions that produce the constant unbalance between inclusion and exclusion. At this point, it is possible to reach a positive definition of democratisation related to the widening or abridgment of the conditions of access and inclusion. In other words, the more a system, structure, regime or theory is inclusionary, the more it is democratic. This is the same as saying that the more emancipatory it is the more democratic it is. However, if we admit that the inclusion of those who have better conditions of accessibility is easier with respect to those with worst conditions of accessibility, we then realise that there is more

democratisation when there is more inclusion of those that are marginalised, oppressed and made to be invisible. What, then, is democratisation? It is the widening of democratic inclusion to those who are excluded, oppressed and made to be invisible. The quality of the inclusion is paramount to refine this definition. Expansion of inclusion presupposes that the ontological characteristic of democratisation is the power to decide about inclusion. There is democratisation when the subjects (political, social, media and academic) with their inclusionary power to define the perimeter of inclusion, expand the perimeter of their own inclusionary power towards those that are excluded, oppressed and made to be invisible (democracy represents the absence of a perimeter and for that it is an ultimate ideal place). This expansion is not simply the expansion of the perimeter of inclusion but is also the expansion of the power to define the perimeter of inclusion. At this point, it is clear why democratisation is the process to change unequal power relations into relations of shared authority (Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXII). In this view, while democracy corresponds to the ideal of horizontality, democratisation is the path of expansion of inclusion towards such an ideal, which is the route of conversion of verticality into horizontality.

This vision of democracy, central to the epistemologies of the South, is the core of the civilisational democratisation proposal that was enhanced by Gandhi as a response to the limits of liberal democracy that he profoundly understood and criticised. Presently these limits of liberal democracy are simply more radical and problematic. The adoption of the definition of 'Gandhian democratisation' represents the application of Gandhi's principles, in light of the epistemologies of the South, as a theoretical-methodological category. It is a category emerging from the anti-colonial South that brings the theory of democratisation beyond the intracultural perspective of the epistemological North. Socio-political movements and organisations that, to different extents, work for the radicalisation of inclusion by enhancing participation, deliberation and the commons, share the trajectory of democratisation – both in the geographical North and South.

Political-colonialism is alien to democratic pluralism. It is the colonialism of one model of democracy over the others that are marginalised, diminished, and trivialised. The identification of democracy with the parliamentary system, representation, and party system, is part of the globalisation of the concept that was born in the West and that has been

elaborated on during the last three centuries. Since the American, and especially the French revolution, such a model has taken on a hegemonic position within the ambit of political theory as its patterns have spread around the world. For the first time in history, what would become a democratic theory was used to govern a state of big proportions and from that moment on the pattern of democracy was dominated by what is known as liberal democracy.

There is no contradiction in referring to liberal democracy as a form of democracy, but there is a colonisation of the socio-political mind when such a model is avowed as the valid one against which all comparisons are to be made. In order to understand that the democratic diversity, or demodiversity (Santos 2006c:40), we need to engage with a critical stance with basic notions of liberal democracy and question its 'undebatable' meanings. We discover that these concepts have never been univocal or 'monocultural', but that they are polysemic and therefore open to 'ecological' validity. What does this imply? An ecological democratic regime is framed in the idea of demodiversity. This is as it welcomes forms of implementing democratic ideas through any form of power sharing and collective decision-making. It does open spaces of interaction among different forms of democracy and reflects on the way such forms can better improve each other. In other words, it is a regime in motion of democratisation. Liberal democracy assumes a colonial posture by dominating the democratisation process and marginalising other democratic forms and ideas. The institutional form of liberal democracy almost exclusively occupies the public democratic imaginary. This is substantive for political-colonisation. The argument of this study stretches the concept of colonialism beyond the conventional use of the term made in the literature. It does so by unveiling the subtle ideological background underpinning liberal democratic regimes, an ideology that is strengthened by a neoliberal globalisation that is hegemonic, exclusionary, elitist and formalistic. While the political elite is not an absolute sovereign in the sense of the ancient regime, it assumes a similar dominant position on the debate of democratic practices while it keeps the institutional control over the possibilities of demodiversity. Being the dominant form of democracy, liberal democracy can be the gate to democratic diversity and it is political party's-movements that seem to be ready to open that gate.

Foreword to the methodology

Noted here in the introduction is an acknowledgement that I make this inquiry from a sided perspective. In this study, I sustain my analysis both methodologically and empirically with the epistemologies of the South. Among the most important keywords and key methodologies of the epistemologies of the South that I privilege is 'unlearning' or the exercise to abandon the old (and passive) certainties in order to embrace a plurality of knowledge which may have existed for millennia but sound new for someone who have never really engaged with them. This approach constitutes an openness to socio-political 'emergences' (many times re-combining previous experience in new ideas and forms), which populate the horizon of possibility and may be beyond the canonical Western paradigm or even the present (*noch nicht*). This approach encompasses two shortcomings or opportunities: firstly, the horizon of inquiry must be much wider than a realist checklist, which is considered as immediate:

[T]he researcher is not just to describe and deal with what can be identified and analyzed using dominant social scientific theories and research procedures. Reality should not be reduced to what exists at a given historical juncture according to these theories and procedures. Uncovering the absences of official discourse and the silenced voices of past and present struggles and identifying the emergent forces that give shape to alternatives are crucial means for the production of a knowledge which does not see the current dynamics of neoliberal, hegemonic globalization and the low intensity forms of democracy and social apartheid it generates as ineluctable, as a fatality to which people should adapt in order to survive (Santos and Nunes 2004b:3).

Secondly, it must embrace a diversity that may lack the systematic consistency of the reduced scale of the kind of knowledge that is considered to be trustable. This means that the primary scope of this work is not to produce solid and definitive answers but to question those answers that are exclusively solid, because these are confined within a 'situated knowledge', with the pretence to be universally valid. For these and other reasons, this work is not aimed at providing a detailed account of what the theory of democracy implies, nor does it aim to state how democracy is or should be. Rather, it wants to show that democracy is simply much more than what it is generally accepted to be in the realm of its mainstream implementation, especially in the global North, and thereby possibly opening up a breach on what democratisation could be.

Analyses of a minimalist and procedural form of democracy, while being more precise, focused and probably even more convincing than the present one, are also more limited in scope. In this work, I enlarge the scope and ambition while being well aware of the fact that I pay the cost of tangibility and therefore for this reason I adopt a solid theoretical and methodological approach in order to maintain the highest possible degree of concreteness. My effort, however, is a shared one and the reader shall be ready to engage with it. I inquire into democratic ideas that are among those that can possibly exist and I do not restrict the research to those that are in the range of realistic large-scale implementation. Inspired by the 'sociology of emergences' (Santos 2014:164–87) I am moved by the belief that searching from what is not yet largely adopted expands the potential of democratic innovation and of realistic implementation even on a large scale. Moreover, it is a more appropriate method of studying democratic innovations because it considers not only what realist theorists assert as undisputable but also what they marginalise as inferior, irrelevant, inaccurate, or simply inexistent.

In order to expand the democratic approach to the study of democracy, I will start in the first chapter by questioning basic concepts and categories in the structure of the realist and minimalist conception of democracy. By doing so, I intend to shake the pillars of the democratic canon at its bases and in that way I hope, I get the attention of the sceptical reader. What is missing is not a mere patch to fix the representative system but rather a refoundation of democratic perspectives that are able to conjugate leadership with horizontality to thereby ward off the re-creation of oligarchies. I believe that the theoretical framework below provides a space for such a theory of democratisation. In order to avoid such an attempt becoming a mere speculation on democracy in its ideal, the theoretical argument (chapters one and two) will be challenged by the empirical evidence emerging from a non-utilitarian¹ comparative study (chapters five, six and seven) that cuts through the North-South divide. This is done because for the theory of democracy to be democratic it shall engage in a dialogue

¹ An example of utilitarian comparative approach for Chatterjee (2011:5–11) is the method to assess and rank the adoption of political and governmental forms by different countries. These methods are generally characterised by quantitative indicators and root back to the *Principles of Morals and Legislation* through which Jeremy Bentham ([1781/1789] 2000) postulated that an appropriate political system could be designed on the base of the legal system in place and a series of religious, cultural, economic, demographic and labour and production data.

encompassing cultures and politics beyond the context in which it has been developed. This is also the best approach to tackle the political-colonial dimension of the mainstream theory of democracy and this study does this as part of a coral effort in the framework of the ALICE project. In so doing, the invitation made by Santos and Nunes twelve years earlier finds some realisation:

[A] convergence is needed between debates on democratic theory within political philosophy, research on contentious politics and comparative approaches to emancipatory initiatives in the South and in the North informed by postcolonial studies and carried out by local research teams connected through transnational networks based on a non-hierarchical approach to knowledge production This convergence will bring fresh perspectives to the debate on the limits of actually existing democracy and the alternatives to the latter. (Santos and Nunes 2004a:9).

Political crisis or political abyssal line

Intellectuals and politicians are called to respond to the lack of accountability of the political establishment, the reduced role historically played by mass parties and the political apathy it generates among the citizenry (Mair 2002). The attempts to rebuild or reinterpret the democratic potential of representation, as legitimation of liberalism, tend to identify new forms of accountability in the 'audience' (Manin 1997, 2014), the 'sight' of a positive acceptance of 'plebiscitary democracy' (Green 2010) and the reconceptualization of democratic representation *tout court* as a deliberative or 'advocacy' exercise (Urbinati 2006b, 2006a). These approaches defend the orthodoxy of the representative model, unveiling the inclination to reinforce the elitist form of democracy that results in further radicalisation of the crisis. After this view, the needs of governability require political stability and the centralisation of political affairs under the control of the elected representatives. The response to popular unrest and the requests of movements for political alternatives is traditionally considered to be a burden for the condition of governability which requires a renewed capacity of social control by the political elite (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975). Liberal democratic regimes focus on the stability of the government (the liberal pillar), its capacity to take efficient and effective decisions and to make them acceptable in society.

The institutional framework and the capacity to make decisions in the interest of wider society measures the quality of the liberal democratic regimes, while the capacity to open spaces of participation to increase the sharing of political power does not. However, the

political crisis undermines the social trust in the political leadership for their incapacity to make decisions that are compliant with the real life needs of most people. As a result, the abstention rate grows and parties that propose an anti-establishment discourse increase their political appeal. Looking at history (Manin 1997), representation is not in crisis because it has never actually achieved its operative mandate in satisfying the democratic criteria of power sharing or accountability. What has lost the role that it used to have are political parties (Mancini 2015) and the political-system as constitutive pillar. In other words, democracy has always been in crisis. This is the current *locus* of the crisis: people do not engage in electoral politics because they are disillusioned with this elitist model of democracy and they feel compressed behind a political 'abyssal line' (Santos 2007a) that is dividing governors and governed, representatives and represented, decision-makers and lay citizens. Therefore the crisis concerns political liberalism as the theoretical dimension that creates this divide. The political abyssal line is maintained for the stability of the government, its reductionist necessity to simplify social diversity in institutional forms and its capacity to take efficient and effective decisions and to make them acceptable in society. On the contrary, people raise a quest for inclusive as opposed to exclusionary politics, they demand to move the political abyssal line with more and not less participation and decentralisation.

From the perspective of the epistemologies of the South, Gandhi was able to move the political abyssal line in various forms, including with the political independence of the country but especially through an alternative vision of democracy that was epistemologically open to a dialogue of civilisations. He rendered socio-political theory more coherent with the life experience of common people, contrasted it with the segregation of the state and civil society and overcome the political stagnation in the public sphere, due to the sedimentation of society in the six social structures emerging in advanced capitalist societies: home-place, production, market, community, citizenship and world-space (Santos 2002: 353–416). Gandhi advocated a contraction of the public sphere in terms of scale, a trans-scalar interaction from the bottom-up from the local to the national and world level. He expanded the political meaning of life in its wholeness that prevents the capitalist stagnation created by the six social structures through an ethical and spiritual dimension that cuts across them all and avert their

very formation in India. This approach returns the non-materialist meaning to individual and social life.

One of the causes of the current stage of the political crisis is contained within the pattern of representation where the paradigm of authorisation is effective while the paradigm of accountability is inadequate or inoperative (Santos and Avritzer 2005). The election of representatives continues to occur as if the representative system was accountable to the represented, but the represented are unable to hold the representatives accountable. Institutional systems of checks and balances are a guarantee but these are uncontrollable by the represented who remain with the sole power of expressing a vote of protest or non-voting in elections. Party-movements attempt to move the political abyssal line focusing on popular engagement and experimenting hybrid forms of participation for the de-radicalisation of representation. A rigid representative system strengthens the elitist character of a regime while the more the representative system is softened by participative forms of power sharing, the more it serves its democratic purpose.

While traditional parties lose their capacity to mobilise and engage people, party-movements with an anti-systemic discourse re-engage people by entering into the system they claim to change, and therefore they are not outsiders but are internal opposition to the party system. Party-movements engage with representation to expand it through participation, this is one of the keys of their success and is a quality that is especially appealing for sympathizers of the left. Moreover, they renew the political elite by involving representatives from civil society in their ranks and thereby menace the hegemony of the political elite. Facing the crisis of political liberalism with these two innovations, they open a breach of democratisation because they bring participation within representation. This process is neither smooth nor linear and the resistance of the political-colonial regimes aims at decreasing the expansion of participatory spaces. The presence of party-movements creates a progressive tension within political regimes, such tension is stimulating to the undertaking or underpinning of democratisation.

Defenders of the representative orthodoxy reject party-movements because they echo the appeal 'by the people' and thereby make an appeal 'to the people'. They stigmatise these political emergences as populists with the generally restricted understanding of

populism as a demagogic and anti-(representative)-political ideology or framework (Abts and Rummens 2007; Akkerman 2003; Pasquino 2005; Urbinati 1998). The question of populism therefore deserves further scrutiny, as it may also be that populism fosters a trans-scalar local-global political unity of diverse participatory experiences in the process to democratise democracy beyond the local level (Santos 2006c:25–27, 2014:178–79)?² The debate on populism needs to enter the differentiation embraced by the main duality of the meaning of the term; that is demagoguery and participation. In the first acceptation, it is a structural component of liberal democracy while in the second it is a response to the flows of liberal democracy and it expands the interaction between representation and participation with popular inclusion. The first chapter engages in a detailed analysis of this topic.

Party-movements may join efforts (for example, to adopt participatory budgeting), with deliberative democratic practices such as those reinvigorating the perspectives of representation in the emerging experiences of peripheral countries that integrate representation and participation (Avritzer 2012). They offer an understanding of where accountability stands and highlighting new ways to identify it. Each experience, however, is a dispersed contribution in the sea of democratisation. The impact of party-movements on this sea of experiences and practices can serve the purpose of bringing participation within institutions and play the reverse effect of re-energising political commitment thereby bridging state and civil society. The sovereign power delegated to the representative by the people is returned back to the people through accountable political action that shares decision-making power. Party-movements address the involvement of citizens as the way to return accountability to the sovereign power holder. Using the label of populism as synonymous of demagoguery is the key political instrument that is used to diminish and dismiss these attempts, but the electoral force of party-movements is driving their blind critics to reconsider their political role.

The research carried out in this study seeks to understand the relationship between party-movements and the political abyssal line with the awareness that there may be tectonic

² Santos maintains that '[i]n the long run, local participatory democracy does not sustain itself without participatory democracy at the national level, and neither of them is possible without participatory democracy at the global level' (Santos 2006c:42).

and superficial movements of the line. Tectonic movements take place in occasions of radical emancipation while superficial moves entail limited emancipation. These differences are due to the dissimilar characters of exclusions, as some are abyssal and others are not.

Do party-movements tackle abyssal exclusions? Party-movements expand the political inclusion of disillusioned citizens. Are they also working on deeper exclusionary issues such as untouchability in India or migration in Italy, in a way that radicalises the emancipatory discourse for the very marginal groups? If they are unable to work out a tectonic shift of the political abyssal line, why is it so? Party-movements seek forms of higher intensity democracy, but the question is whether or not they envisage a post-abyssal democracy that entails a paradigmatic transition.

Democracy and the epistemologies of the South

Contemporary theories of democratic representation reinterpret the praxis to suite the existing theory instead of criticising the theory because it is too distant from the expected practice. Liberal democracy constitutes an advanced set of prescriptions and political procedures, especially the focus on equal dignity of all human beings proper of the discipline of human rights and largely grounded in the English, French and American revolutions. However, liberal democracy remains a privilege as it is attained by only a minimal percentage of the world's population (Wallerstein 2013:149–69). It is based on the capitalist world-system that for Walerstein is in decline and to which an alternative shall arise through a phase of intense political struggle that will occupy the first half of the XXI century. Wallerstein maintains that although we never had a democratic world system, this is possible, but a clarification is fundamental: '[d]emocracy, it must be said, is about equality, which is the opposite of racism, the pervasive sentiment of political life in the capitalist world-economy' (Wallerstein, 2013, p. 166). Racism is the form of radical exclusion of time immemorial that with colonialism became the pattern of world politics. A democratic world system can emerge when domestic democratic systems are democratic enough for that. What is the measure of this democratic level? The level of the three forms of oppression emerged in Western modernity and that characterise abyssal thinking: colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. The epistemologies of the South operate in the struggle against these three forms of oppression

and this thesis engages especially with the first in the form it is engraved in the democratic theory and practice.

This research also tends to provide an answer to the background question: why should postcolonial thinking be combined with democratic theory at all? Chatterjee frames the answer and the challenge that it raises:

The postcolonial politics frequently presents a moral critique of the normative standards upheld by Western political theory and improvises practices that run parallel or counter to the approved forms. The theoretical challenge that is thereby posed is twofold. The first is the challenge to break the abstract homogeneity of the mythical time-space of Western normative theory by emphasizing the real history of its formation through violent conflict and imposition of hegemonic power. The second is the even greater challenge to redefine the normative standards of modern politics in the light of the considerable accumulation of new practices that may at present be described only in the language of exceptions but which in fact contain the core of a richer, more diverse, and inclusive set of norms (Chatterjee 2011:22).

Chatterjee highlights here three important features that I believe apply to the present work. Firstly, it is a set of practices that run ‘parallel or counter to’ institutional political forms. Secondly, it is a shared task of different social sciences and especially a task for historians to inquiry and thoroughly examine the forms of silencing the practices that run ‘parallel’ to the hegemonic political theory of Western modernity. The epistemologies of the South are equipped for this task with the ‘sociology of absences’, that takes up the challenge of translating the historical work in a sociological effort to investigate the echo of those radical exclusions and give back ethical value to political knowledge that was declared inadequate, irrelevant or parochial. The third characteristic of the ongoing work is to adopt the ‘sociology of emergences’ to reinvigorate the political experiences and knowledge offered by a plurality of actors who struggle to be recognised by a politically-colonial regime and who generally achieve, at maximum, a state of exception in that regime. This is specifically the task of this research. The enterprise of the epistemology of the South is related to the awareness that research does not look for a solid and unitary political hegemonic alternative, but for contributions to an ‘ecology’ of democratic knowledge. Such an ecology is built through ‘intercultural translations’ of democratic practices and experiences, not because they are perfect in their capacity to convert vertical relations of power into horizontal relations of power, but because they have this democratic horizon and/or because they effectively

contribute to the progress of theory and practice by imitation of their success or through criticism and improvement of their failures.

The democratisation of democracy is ephemeral if it does not include a postcolonial perspective. The failure to include this perspective is not limited to the international level, but also to the multicultural and globalised societies of domestic polities. Social movements mobilise nationally and internationally to protest against political-colonialism. For example, in 2011, the indignados and occupy movements made it clear the principle of democracy that they share, and although non-homogeneous, it rejects the excess of power-centralism and the political abyssal line. The alternatives envisaged do not merely seek to change one leadership with another while maintaining the system unchanged, rather, they envisage a more participatory paradigm able to decentralise and devolve political power in a 'strong democracy' (Barber 2003). This is already achieved in 'forms of high-intensity democracy based on the active participation of the populations' (Santos 2006c:41).

This research investigates democratic theories and practices that are counter-hegemonic and cautious with the diversity of the democratic experiences of the world. The work considers the Eurocentric tradition and criticises it from the perspectives of the non-Eurocentric theory from the South. This theory from the South sometimes may even avoid the use of Eurocentric wording and terminology, and it may even not talk about democracy, but through an intercultural reading, this is what it refers to. The research aims therefore at looking for two centrifugal/marginal conceptions of democracy, one in the global South and one in the global North. 'The baroque', understood as the centrifugal forces of liberal democracy fostering a new political imagination is a category that sustains the analysis as well as the South, the margin and the periphery. The margin (people) and the centre (political elite) have contrasting conceptions of democracy, as the power of the people and as an institutionalised model of power management respectively. This study has sought to find out ways to strengthen the marginal concept of democracy.

Two clarifications are important. The first is that this thesis is not against representation, neither Gandhi's democratic vision nor the epistemologies of the South develop a democratic theory in that sense. The theory presented here, that has been proposed and tested, is about the de-radicalisation of representation in order to make it

accountable and to find ways to combine it with a participatory political culture in order to de-colonise political regimes. Party-movements represent interesting cases that the empirical chapters below analyse in order to understand their scope as well as their consistency, shortcomings and potentialities. The analysis provides evidence that in any case constitute progress for democratic theory, both for their successes to be emulated and for their failures to be prevented and avoided. The progress for the theory is guaranteed by the dialogue with Gandhi's democratic vision and the epistemologies of the South.

To what extent do party-movements decolonise liberal democratic regimes? It is also to be acknowledged that the idea and theory of representation has evolved throughout modernity, therefore the focus of the critiques targets the mainstream development of democracy as a realist form or regime. On the other hand, as this text does not oppose representation *per se*, it does not defend participation *tout-court*. There is certainly a radical vision of participation, which is defended here, but participation is a quite complex concept and participatory practices are diverse. We shall see how far the theory will be embraced and challenged by the real practice of democratisation.

The second thing to clarify is that, there may be several reasons to choose Gandhi and the epistemologies of the South to propose an alternative post-colonial perspective on democracy. Post-colonialism is not a united and unambiguous body of theoretical and empirical knowledge (Hall 1996; Santos 2006a, 2010b; Shohat 1992), and, as a consequence, a choice of references is unavoidable and I believe that the combination of these two theoretical proposals is particularly appropriate to think of alternative democratisation. While Gandhi's perspective has a wide scope, he was also criticised in his South African years for his Indian parochialism compared to other subaltern struggles. As we will see below, Gandhi matured a much wider scope of action along the years, nonetheless the epistemologies of the South provide theoretical and methodological instruments that shed new light on Gandhi's ideas. For example, the work of intercultural and interpolitical translations among subaltern struggles that are against colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. While also strengthened by Gandhian and Indian experiences, this theoretical framework is endowed with the Latin American and African struggles of Indigenous people, farmers, afro-descendants, women, feminists and other discriminated and oppressed populations. The theoretical speculation is

not a search of a general theory but an ecological (as opposed to monocultural) approach to a theory of democracy.

Inter-civilisational democratisation

This study is essentially based on the acceptance of democracy as a process of inclusion, and therefore democratisation, which implies inflecting democracy as a continuous action of horizontal transformation of power relations. One may realistically argue that democratisation is something different concerning the art of governing a polity and therefore, it is just an external tendency of political regimes and theories, whose focus is administering and governing rather than including. The inter-civilisational approach propounded by Gandhi and elaborated through Santos stands precisely in opposition to this view. This approach maintains that a political regime dismissing inclusion for governance is characterised by political-colonialism while an emancipatory type of regime stresses inclusion and addresses political conflicts with the audacity of translation.

Political post-colonial translations imply a different relation between the state and society and culture and politics are strictly interlinked as they form the alternative democratic grammar to oppose the subtle cultural imperialism of the West inscribed in liberal democracy. These inter-civilisational approaches inquire into alternatives to the crisis of liberalism as they assume that the theory and practice of democracy and democratisation cannot be boxed into the political issue (which incorporates the culture of the political form of liberal democracy), for it is as well a social, economic and cultural space of relations. Democracy includes these diversities that combined to shape the organisational form to govern society and distribute powers within it. Gandhi's worldview finds a recent echo in the encounters and debates animating the World Social Forum of which Santos is one of the founding members (Santos 2005b, 2006c). The alter globalism of the WSF is a privileged space to practice intercultural translations and respond to the crisis of political liberalism. It inquires the constitutional pillar and questions the domain of the state. On the one hand, it recognises the raising challenge of global issues advocating that solutions cannot be domestic. On the other hand, it contests the division between state and civil society advocating a different interaction among the two and a different structure.

Gandhi's civilisational worldview went far beyond the political realm and attempted to shift a plurality of abyssal lines not only at the political level. His view is based on four objectives of life: *dharma* (ethics), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (passion) and *moksha* (spiritual liberation). Gandhi's thought inquiries and criticises the centrality of wealth and passion that characterise Western liberal democratic regimes. He shakes the roots of Western modernity with his 'non-possession' individualism, as is demonstrated below. Gandhi's political sociology restructures the political dimension starting from the bottom-up and frames a participatory politics where liberal values are expanded and based on duties and social service, starting from the local dimension. Santos' epistemologies of the South embark on this and other rich political visions from a postcolonial perspective and open contemporary political theory up to redesign the relationship between the state and civil society with the dual exercise of denouncing the radical exclusions of Western modernity and advocating an ecological thinking. The emerging democratisation theory advocates what the crisis of liberalism negates, that is participation and inclusion in the political sphere and expansion (as opposed to limitation) of the political sphere. The term 'Gandhian' associated with 'democratisation' penetrates democracy to give it a perspective. By adopting this terminology, I make an analytical speculation on the perspectives for democracy that were opened by Gandhi and reinvigorated by party-movements, regardless of how fragmented and incomplete their proposals may be. The use of the term 'Gandhian' and its adoption to analyse two diverse realities, such as those of the AAP and the M5S, is proposed here to identify connections among opponents of political-colonialism in different parts of the world, and in different social, cultural and political settings. With this choice, instead of restricting the research to descriptive objectives, critical normativity is also explored and is elaborated on in the last chapter.

With the diffusion of liberal democratic regimes, the pervasion of neoliberal globalisation and the rise of the global economy, we can see that the political crisis affects the world in cross-cultural perspectives. Different polities adopt similar regimes types with unavoidable cultural stress. The serendipity effect of reading Gandhi in light of the epistemologies of the South has intercultural implications for the sociological and political analysis of how a theory of democratisation needs to reconsider its relation with the social

subjects and their worldviews. Gandhi advocated a spiritual but secular democratic vision that accounts for a comprehensive politics of life exceeding the pluralism and toleration inscribed in Western liberalism. He spent the last four decades of his life trying to make India an example of this multidimensional democratic vision, an example that he wished could benefit the whole world.

Europe and the West today face many similarities with Gandhi's India. On the one side, there 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, an equally varied front exists of those that, as Gandhi and Santos have alluded to, prospect intercultural dialogue in search of advanced social relations closely based on the dignity of people and peoples. The challenge for the second group is to implement intercultural and intracultural translations as the instruments to deliver a collective front of responses, recurrently under scrutiny and in constant reshaping, to be able to provide answers to the multifaceted meaning of democracy of which serendipity is the only constant to be expected. Being an ongoing, ever changing and never-ending enterprise, democratisation rather than democracy is the best definition that encompasses its philosophical, social, cultural and political understandings. To what extent do party-movements such as the AAP and the M5S embrace the democratisation path envisaged by Gandhi? The answer to this and other related questions are provided below.

Hypothesis and chapter synopsis

The hypotheses as well as the research questions of this study are elaborated on in detail at the end of the methodological chapter. In short, liberal democratic regimes are characterised by political-colonialism, a system in which the ruling elite politically dominate over society that is abysmally marginalised and excluded from political power. Gandhi's democratic theory and experimental practices constitute an alternative which stands in contrast to political-colonialism and advances forms of participation and devolution that overcome it. Being alternative and thinking of alternates, the epistemologies of the South translate Gandhi's knowledge with other subjectivities engaged in the struggle against political-colonialism and for democratisation. Analysing party-movements such as the AAP and the M5S in a South-North comparison, I investigate their successes and failures in

democratising democratic theory and practice in light of the paradigm of Gandhian democratisation – an analytical category to assess post-political-colonial democratic developments. The hypothesis is that party-movements, in light of the theoretical framework, stimulate the reflection on the democratisation of democracy but do so with their own successes and failures.

This study is divided into three parts (theory, methodology and contextualisation and empirical analysis) and seven chapters. The first chapter makes a critical assessment of basic notions and categories proper to democracy and central to liberal democratic regimes. The first category is the people, the nominal holders of sovereignty but also an exclusionary category that is mobilised to represent both the wholeness of a political community as well as only a part of it, i.e., the lower vulgar classes. The concept of representation is equally nebulous as it is defined by the relationship between the represented and the representatives that includes a number of dynamic dimensions such as identity, ideas and ideologies. Centred on representation, liberal democracy operates through the rule of the elite and people are allowed to participate in the political decision by choosing the establishment that must represent and rule them. The centrality of elections and elites characterises regimes as formal democracy while substantive democracy demands a higher level of power sharing. Populism is a category used to frame different political phenomena characterised by a greater involvement of the people in contrast with the elite. While this is a contested category entailing demagoguery as well as participation, it helps problematize the relationship between people and the elite in the representative arena. The last section of the first chapter extensively investigates the historical, philosophical, social and political significance of political-colonialism, one of the central analytical criteria of this thesis.

The second chapter explores Gandhi's democratic theory, analyses his postcolonial, intercultural and civilisational proposal that reshapes the relation of the individual and the community. It elaborates on the state's domain and on the notion of *swaraj* or self-rule. These are combined together with other fundamental categories that are needed to understand Gandhi's political philosophy such as *ahimsa*, *satyagraha* and *ashram*. The second sub-chapter enters into the complex issue of India's democracy, the question of caste, and does so by analysing the composite relationship between Ambedkar, leader of the Untouchable

community and freedom fighters, and Gandhi, a debate that still rages on. The third section analyses Gandhian democratisation by contextualising Gandhi through the epistemologies of the South. It elaborates on an inter-civilisational perspective and explores forms to engage with democratisation by way of interpolitical and intercultural translations defining an epistemological ecology of democratic knowledge and practices. It finally elaborates on the significance of the baroque and carnival for the political.

The third chapter analyses the methodology detailing the methods, procedures, instruments used, the typology and details of the data that were collected during and after two ethnographic fieldwork periods, one in India (2014) and the other in Italy (2015). It accounts for the reasons and challenges of adopting a qualitative comparative methodology combined with the extended case study. It explores the reflexive methodology adopted elaborating on the challenges and constraints of the researcher's involvement in the field and beyond, including in the physical and relational experience of active research. This chapter explores the methodological relevance of the epistemologies of the South and it ends by elaborating on the research rationale and the research hypothesis and questions.

Chapter four is dedicated to the contextualisation of the cases and the socio-political background of India and Italy, paying particular attention to the transitions of the respective party systems over the last decades and the relative implication for the political crisis. These two sections provide circumstantial information on the origin and early developments of the AAP and the M5S.

In chapter five the analysis engages with the empirical findings of the ethnographic study of the AAP. It starts by exploring the concept of people or 'common person' and follows up with the political discourse of the party that takes back the participatory proposal of *swaraj* as developed by Gandhi and especially adapted to the urban context. It examines the efforts of the AAP in creating new forms of defining the party's leadership and political manifesto and its relation to ideology. Next, it engages with the delicate issue of equality, exploring how the political discourse of the AAP is characterised by achievements and failures.

Chapter six makes the analysis of the empirical evidence in relation to the M5S. The analysis focuses on the local groups of Latina, their form of organisation and the leadership

dynamics. The following section explores the organisation and leadership at the national level. The third section focuses on one of the most significant innovations of the M5S, the use of e-democracy combined with the discourse of direct democracy. Finally, the chapter stresses the question of populism and explores the post-ideological discourse of the party-movement. The M5S, just as the AAP, face challenges and shortcomings and the chapter critically engages with both.

The seventh and last chapter explores how the case studies affect the theoretical framework and how the theoretical framework helps analyse the case studies in view of the democratisation of democracy. It draws the comparative analysis of the two cases and it makes an appreciation of the analytical categories with a focus on the impact of the party-movements in political-colonialism. It further investigates the category of populism, apart from the demagogic mainstream definition, and how it applies to party-movements only if considered in their participatory appreciation. The study then ends with the concluding and normative remarks.

Part One: Theoretical approach

1 Unpacking democracy

The unpacking of democracy, is an exercise aimed at defining the idea of democracy (which includes a range of conceptions and experiences) and at exploring the characteristics that define the viewpoint of the study undertaken here. Clarifying the nature of the object and the perspective used to approach its study is a necessary step due to the amplitude of understandings and uses of the word 'democracy'.³

Democracy is a conventional word, originating from the Egyptian root *demos* meaning 'small village' (Dussel 2007:11) and developed from *demos* meaning 'people' in ancient Greece. Its meaning is much wider than the one developed in the European context, something which has to do with its shared understanding within and among cultures (Calhoun 2013). The scope of this study aims to embrace the idea of democracy starting from, but going beyond, the predominant liberal representative domain and to therefore incorporate different words or paraphrases referring to the same idea.⁴

This research departs from the assumption that democracy is an exclusive matter of political organisation, and rather believes that democracy is a dynamic form of sharing and implementing power emerging from social relations. Democracy is of central relevance in the ontological conception of human life as understood in its relational existence: i.e., it is the idea of equality in the relational dimension. Since social relations are regulated by a balance of forces, the power that subjugates to those forces – and therefore to the relational existence – is paramount in the democratic experience. With this understanding, it is clear why democracy and horizontal power sharing are strictly related: 'Substantively, democracy concerns the quality of human experience and the social relations that it makes possible. It

³ In the first place, it is mandatory to acknowledge that the word 'democracy' became synonymous for various – and conflicting – political concepts roughly recalled by Beetham. 'Here, for example, is a list of some of the things people have called "democracy" over the past fifty years or so: rule of the people, rule of the people's representatives, rule of the people's party, the well-being of the people, majority rule, dictatorship of the proletariat, maximum political participation, élite competition for the people's vote, multi-partyism, political and social pluralism, equal citizenship rights, civil and political liberties, a free or open society, a civil society, a free market economy, whatever we do in the UK or USA, the "end of history", all things bright and beautiful' (Beetham 2005:1).

⁴ Amongst others, the Indian word *swaraj*, meaning "self-rule", is an example of the idea of democracy expressed via a different word. Santos has analysed democracy in intercultural perspectives comparing *swaraj* together with concepts originating in the Andean region, such as *Sumak Kawsay*, *Pachama* and *Buen Vivir* - all appealing to a concept of communitarian democracy (Santos 2009).

can be defined as the entire process through which unequal power relations are replaced by relations of shared authority' (Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXII).

With this view in mind, the 'democratisation of democracy' – which implies the identification and valorisation of a plurality of ideas and experiences of democracy as well as forms to distribute power horizontally – needs to start with a decolonisation of the political dimension of democracy (in which the liberal representative form has assumed a dominant role).

The fact that a concept of democracy may become a pattern or a canon is undemocratic, and is a contradiction in terms. The mainstream political discourse is often centred on, and limited to, the pattern of the Western liberal representative canon. This is one of the reasons why I call this kind of discourse 'political-colonialism', a point which I argue later. In order to democratise the democratic discourse, a number of steps must be taken. The first step is to widen the understanding of democracy by assessing some of its para-dogmatic assumptions.

As for historical colonialism, and also in political-colonialism, post-colonial thinking is, 'conceived as problem-space, points to the persistence of narratives and concepts originated in the past, and that remain in the present in an immutable form' (Meneses 2011b:93, 2011a). A post or anti-colonial concept of democracy must undergo a critical assessment, i.e., a deconstruction of concepts that are crystallised and Untouchable in the political-colonial domain, starting from core concepts such as people and representation, an unveiling of the elitist character of political regimes and a penetrating of emerging demagogic arguments related to populism. The exercise of 'unpacking democracy' aims at deconstructing the form of thinking of those that have been politically patronised by the liberal representative canon that functions as a dominant political domain, similar to how the historical colonial powers rule over their former colonies. The revision of core concepts of modern rationality is a fundamental step in the affirmation of 'cognitive justice' which post-colonialism advocates (Meneses 2009:234–35; Santos 2009, 2014; Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2008).

In this work, when used, the term democracy generally refers to the 'idea of democracy' maintaining that such a theoretical dimension is related and defined by different

political, economic and cultural-social practices. This means that democracy does not merely exist in the abstract, but that it exists in reality for those who work and struggle to achieve its idea and shape it. This is because ‘democracy does not exist, there is only democratization. Democracies must be ranked according to the intensity of the processes of shared authority’ (Santos 2006c:40). Shared authority then, or sharing of power, is the measure used to understand how the idea is inscribed in political, social, economic and cultural praxes, as democracy is a space of action where political power is never unconditionally delegated but always and newly retained (Barber 2003:117–38).

Democracy, when understood as being ‘power of the people’ implies a double domain. This is as Agamben maintains that democracy is both a ‘form of constitution’ and a ‘form of government’, and he continues, ‘[t]oday we behold the overwhelming preponderance of the government and the economy over anything you could call popular sovereignty — an expression by now drained of all meaning’ (Agamben 2011a:4, see also 2011b). The question of power, which is the object defined by the sovereign and handled by the executor, is paramount to penetrate the debate. The relationship between democracy and power (both, as it is defined and how it is executed) is at the base of freedom and equality. While power abuses mark the democratic relationship, emancipation from these abuses is another democratic force of central importance as ‘emancipatory democracy is the whole process of changing power relations into relations of shared authority’ (Santos 2006c:129). Also, Rancière confirms that ‘democracy is simply peculiar to those who have no more entitlements to govern than to submit’ (Rancière 2006:46–47).⁵ The distinction between the governed and governors is not peculiar to democratic regimes but common to all political regimes, whether they be ancient, modern or contemporary. What is distinctive of democracy is the assumption that these two groups are not destined to be indefinitely divided, as all people in a polity may belong to each of them. Ever since, this has been the reason for ‘hearted

⁵ Unlike Agamben, Rancière also affirms that ‘[d]emocracy is neither a form of government that enables oligarchies to rule in the name of the people, nor is it a form of society that governs the power of commodities. It is the action that constantly wrests the monopoly of public life from oligarchic governments, and the omnipotence over lives from the power of wealth. It is the power that, today more than ever, has to struggle against the confusion of these powers, rolled into one and the same law of domination’ (Rancière 2006:96).

of democracy' by those who consider that the government of a polity must be taken care of by an elite of skilled practitioners (Rancière, 2006).⁶

What characterises democracy goes beyond the mere primacy of individual freedom, something that can also be guaranteed in other political regimes. Such was the case, for instance, with liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It is important to underline that liberalism entered the states' political realm before democracy and democracy had to adapt to it (Macpherson 1964b Part 1; Sartori 1993:203–12).⁷ In the contemporary debate, democracy became a political alternative due to the emergence of equality as a moral value and as the political meta-right. In other words, the idea of democracy is to extend freedom to all people belonging to a polity, as opposed to a restricted number of privileged citizens – as was the case in ancient Greece or with modern liberalism. Badiou, elaborates on the philosophical justification that identifies democracy with the 'politics of radical equality' that disjoints politics from democracy when it does not avoid inequality (Badiou 2005:78–95). The emergence of equality as a universal meta-right, combined with the previous primacy of freedom, defines a historical trajectory in which the tendency to polarise prevails, and not a tendency to harmonise – the meaning of democracy around the pillars of freedom and equality. This is a crosscutting paradox of democratic theory (Mouffe 2000).

In this chapter, I will tackle the concept and forms of democracy through a deconstructive exercise. In complex and extended polities where representation assumes the connotation of unavoidable necessity, the concept of 'people' (as the part to be represented) and 'representation' (the meaning and outreach of the action to represent) gains a central importance. Despite this, however, people's representation needs also to be understood through two opposite dynamics by which people and representation actually take place in the concrete implementation of democracy. These are 'populisms' (politics defined by the

⁶ Since Plato and Aristotle until the nineteenth century, democracy, 'when it was thought of at all, was defined as the rule by the poor, the ignorant, the incompetent, at the expense of the leisured, civilised, propertied class' (Macpherson 1989:9–10). Since the nineteenth century it has been formalised in different ways of representing the people, none of which giving back the power to them but rather creating a divide between representative and represented (Costantini 2012; Manin 1997; see also Santos and Avritzer 2005).

⁷ Barber 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' (Barber, 2003 p. XXXIV).

construction of an alternative idea of people compared to the established one) and ‘elitism’ (politics designed as the necessary rule of a political elite over the people). Deconstructions of meta-concepts and political definitions structural in liberal democracy, allow us to amplify the impossibility of any epistemological or hermeneutical monopoly over them. While investigating the democratic idea through contingent experiences, I dialogue with liberal democracy, being well aware of the fact that it is not a monolithic model applied everywhere under the same conditions, nor does it exhaust the possibility of thinking about democracy and democratisation as a political regime. Therefore, it is, a broad term of reference used to envisage paths capable of deepening the understanding of the idea of democracy and the real implications.

1.1 What makes the people

1.1.1 *Meaning and synonym*

Is it possible to account for the degree of humanness of a group of persons for the concept that it has of itself? If a group considers itself to be a slave of vice, ignorant, vulgar, immoral, shall it imply that the level of humanness of this group of people is residual? And what’s the relationship between humanness and democracy? Democracy is the equality of humanness, the horizon of the intellectual, moral and cultural progress of a group of people in a form that does not prevail for a few and excludes most. With this vision of democracy, the concept of people is clearly central: it can be achieved when the people see themselves as intellectually, morally, and culturally human. However this concept of ‘people’ has been missing in modern political thought since before the French revolution, when the people was considered to be a homogeneous mass of inferior beings close to animal nature (Ruocco and Scuccimarra 2011:24). The people is an entity which represents wholeness but is also treated with paternalism by the intellectual and political elites, as happened with the enlightenment (Ruocco 2009:51). This gives rise to a bifurcation in the meaning of the term.

The meaning of the word ‘people’ – or its declination with political synonymy such as ‘nation’, ‘citizens’, ‘citizenry’, ‘common person’, ‘lay people’, ‘population’, ‘political

community’, ‘community’ or ‘lay citizens’ – is a fundamental category to unveil what democracy implies.⁸

In the first few pages of the beginning of what is arguably his most famous writing, *what is the third estate* (1789), Abbé Sieyès clarified a concept of people that became paramount in the French revolution and for the political history and political theory that followed. Affirming that the Third Estate supports society, Sieyès defines the revolutionary struggle against the established aristocracy. On the one hand, the nation is defined by the common interest codified in common law, on the other hand, the mere will of individuals to unite makes them a nation, as it ‘exists prior to everything; it is the origin of everything. Its will is always legal. It is the law itself’ (Sieyès 2003:136), although, the nation materialises with the individual willingness forming the common will. Finally, when the association grows, the creation of ‘government proxy’ (delegation through election) facilitates the exercise of the representative common will and power, the minimum delegation requested to maintain social order (Sieyès 2003:134–35).⁹

The Third Estate, for Sieyès, incorporated all social strata that performed the services necessary for the ‘nation’, while the aristocracy benefitted of social privileges and governing positions that it performed badly, and it therefore, was a burden for the nation. Opening up the governing position to the Third Estate would better their quality of delivery. Sieyès advocated a nation without orders, made of equals (men), he spoke of the aristocracy as if it were a caste and a parasitic ‘people’:

it may well be true that there is no more than one privileged caste, that of the nobility. It is quite genuinely a people apart, but it is a false people that, not being able to exist by itself, since it has no functioning organs, attaches itself to a real nation like one of those parasitic forms of vegetation that live off the sap of the plants that they exhaust and desiccate. The clergy, the law, the army, and the administration amount to four classes of public officials needed everywhere (Sieyès 2003:97 footnote 5).¹⁰

⁸ For a declination of the use of people see Merker (2009).

⁹ In this passage, Sieyès adopts for the first time in the essay the term ‘community’ with reference to the emerging nation.

¹⁰ This passage does also recall the justification of social classification that Sieyès considered constitutive of society. A few pages earlier he described the four classes of private employment such as land worker, human industries that perfect the ‘gift of nature’, intermediaries between producers and consumers and intellectuals and domestic workers – all services for the person (Sieyès 2003:94–95). However classes is a generic term that Sieyès uses more vaguely as when he defines the ‘new citizenship’ emerged after feudalism: ‘trade and

This quote illustrates (and the rest of the text confirms) that in Sieyès eyes, the term ‘nation’ is the synonym of ‘people’ or ‘caste’ which, in turn, replaces the word ‘class’. He affirms this again, with reference to nobility as ‘[a] class like that is surely foreign to a nation because of its idleness’ (Sieyès 2003:97).¹¹

The nation ‘is a body of associates living under a common law,¹² represented by the same legislature’ (Sieyès 2003:97). It is more definite than the people as it is united by the common law that is based on the common interest, something that is impossible with the social division in orders: ‘[a] nation that is split into orders can never have anything in common and can never be one nation’ (Sieyès 2003:128).¹³ Representatives of the aristocracy do not represent the people, as ‘[i]t would be foreign to the Nation first, by virtue of its principle, because its mandate did not come from the people, and second, by virtue of its object, because this consists in defending, not the general interest, but a particular one’ (Sieyès 2003:98). The people is a body entitled to organically select its representatives and mandate them to defend its interest in its wholeness by decisions taken with the rule of the majority: ‘we have already established the need to define the common will as the view of the majority alone. This maxim is indisputable. It follows that in France ‘the representatives of the Third Estate¹⁴ are the true custodians of the national will’ (Sieyès 2003:150). According to Sieyès,

the arts have, so to speak, created a multiplicity of new classes, including a large number of opulent families, rich in well-educated and public-spirited men’ (Sieyès 2003:114).

¹¹ Each order is a nation, ‘It is clear enough that the nobility has not been mandated by the clergy or the Third Estate. The clergy does not carry a mandate from the nobility or the commons. It follows that each order is a distinct nation and is no more competent to interfere in the affairs of the other orders than, for example, the Dutch Estates-General or the Council of Venice might be entitled to vote in the proceedings of the English Parliament’ (Sieyès 2003:148). Since the Third Estate represents the vast majority of the French population (around 25 million against 200 thousand people of the other two orders together) it has the capacity to represent the whole nation. The principle of majority awards such superior representative possibility to the Third Estate.

¹² It is provided by elected representatives of the nation: ‘it is the nation alone that is able to will for itself and, consequently, create laws for itself’ (Sieyès 2003:131). Also: ‘If we lack a constitution, then a constitution must be made, and the Nation alone has the right to do so’ (Sieyès 2003:133).

¹³ Sieyès echoes Rousseau: ‘It is important, then, in order to have a clear declaration of the general will, that there should be no factions in the State, and that every citizen should express only his own opinion’ (Rousseau 2002:173).

¹⁴ The main argument being that they represent 25 million people while the other two orders together represent only 200 thousand people. Sieyès argues that since the majority represents the nation, the Third Estate by itself is the nation (Sieyès 2003:151). The correspondence of majority with nation here finds a paradigmatic foundation.

the people shifts from the ‘body of associates living under a common law’ to the majority, and the system of representation shifts this majority back to a few.

The struggle of Sieyès against the division of society into three orders founds the nation on the individual and discharges the possibility of collectiveness as a subcomponent of the people or nation. Although the historical origin of this assumption was the epiphany of a struggle against the exclusion created by elitist sub-communities (aristocracy and clergy), it is also the root cause of a rigid concept of people as based solely on individuals and oriented to the totality through appreciation of the majority. This concept becomes an obstacle to different conceptions of democracy – such as communitarian democracy – in which the role of the individual is intertwined in the collective dimension (although inferior to the wholeness of the people).¹⁵ Calhoun maintains that ‘[c]ulturally, the most decisive idea behind nationalism (or national identity) is the modern notion of the individual’ (Calhoun 2007:87).

Giuseppe Mazzini, political leader of the Italian unification in the XIX century, constructs the definition starting from individuals which are aggregated in a superior common entity which is the nation, understood as a united political people. Mazzini maintains that democracy should be based on the duty of individuals for the nation. The terms democracy and republic are virtually synonymous to him as ‘they symbolize a political project against oppression and despotic rule, and their ultimate goal is the emancipation of individual human beings’ (Recchia and Urbinati 2009:10). For Mazzini, the Italian people’s struggle for independence was fostered by the common republican past of the various reigns and city states (Held 2006:29–55) and the sharing of the sufferance produced by oppression under foreign rule (Mazzini 2009:41–43). Mazzini’s philosophy of history influenced his concept of people, as he writes:

By people we mean the ENTIRETY OF HUMAN BEINGS THAT MAKE UP THE NATION. However, a multitude of individuals does not yet constitute a Nation, unless it is directed by common principles, governed by the same laws, and united in a fraternal bond. Nation is a word that stands for Unity: Unity of principles, of purpose, and of rights (Mazzini 2009:48).

Mazzini echoes Sieyès by maintaining the unity of principles, purpose (common will) and rights of the Nation. However, he added a Kantian idealist cosmopolitan perspective,

¹⁵ Such as in the Gandhian tradition or in the tradition of the indigenous people of Latin America (Santos 2009; Villoro 2007)

advocating for the independence of democratic peoples identified within nations and within relative states and for their cooperation at the international level to achieve democratic peace (see also Kant 2006; Recchia and Urbinati 2009). He also argues for the constitution of the Italian nation to be in a cosmopolitan perspective, because in a diverse country such as Italy, with a divide between north and south (that has persisted since Mazzini's time), the meaning of people can only generally be equated with the meaning of nation described with common principles, laws and purpose. The use of the term 'nation' is useful for the construction of a people in the making, who is yet fragmented. Here, the terms 'people' and 'nation' are both oriented towards popular sovereignty, with a conception entangled in the state and its modern form, as in France and Italy. According to Mazzini, however, the nation had a wider scope as it served to achieve the unity among peoples. He affirmed that 'we believe that without first establishing our own Country [patria], we can hardly contribute to the future organization of humanity. Without peoples there can be no alliance of peoples. [...] Humanity constitutes the end and the nation the means' (Mazzini 2009:63). On the one hand sovereignty is the goal in nationalist political struggles, while on the other hand, it is also the perpetual goal of democracy. In the latter case, it remains a vague reference without a solid definition of what is the 'people' that holds that sovereignty.

In Western political history, the concept of popular sovereignty became the reference of political thought (during the enlightenment) and the subject of political action (during the English, American and French revolutions) after the lessons of Rousseau (2002). Rousseau defined the general will as a theoretical construct that represents the common good of all, dissociated from individual interests, or the empirical formation of opinion, including, unanimity or majority. It is a pure representation of the common good, of the community, and therefore, ultimate authority-ultimate sovereignty, which is pure reason located in the collective moral conscience (Dunn 2002:10). The 'general will' is a fundamental concept to understand sovereignty, as for Rousseau, the latter is the exercise of the former: 'sovereignty, being nothing but the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and that the sovereign power, which is in fact a collective being, can be represented only by itself; power indeed can be transmitted, but not will' (Rousseau 2002:170). Sovereignty is the exercise of the pure expression of people's general will.

The principles of Rousseau and Sieyès thoughts influenced the French revolution and have had an historical importance for the role of the ‘people’ as holder of the sovereign power. The American revolutionaries reaffirmed the notion of people as right holder (Merker 2009:18) as did the British Bill of Rights (1689). The explicit formulation of popular sovereignty, however, is a French novelty:

The historical importance of the French Revolution to the theory of sovereignty is located in Article III of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” of 1789, which declared: “The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.” This is the historic appearance of the sovereign “nation” that never appeared in the English Bill of Rights or the US Constitution (Shinoda 2000:45).

The definition of ‘people and its sovereignty’ has never been achieved and remains a vague and abstract term that is used with equal uncertainty in contemporary parliamentary-democratic regimes (Ruocco and Scuccimarra 2011). From the ambiguity of the word ‘people’, its meaning and – as a consequence – its sovereignty, the history of democracy as a political regime is characterised by ‘disappointment’ and ‘indecisiveness’ (Rosanvallon 2000).

From the history of the notion of people, all women, slaves, poor people and people under colonial rule were excluded. This implies that as much as the notion was created, it was negated. While in France, after the lessons of Sieyès, difference of race, identity and religion could not have implications for the equality inbuilt in the people, i.e., not all people could be equal (Merker 2009:19–20). For example in Haiti, the emerging people of the Haitian revolution were fought against and their struggle for sovereignty was silenced because it was deemed to be unthinkable (Trouillot 1995). As will be seen, this is characteristic of abyssal thinking (Santos 2007a, 2014:118–35), which produces radical exclusions which are constitutive of modern representative democratic regimes.

1.1.2 United and divided – wholeness and part

The notion of ‘people’ unites and divides (i.e., internal-external differentiation) and creates internal boundaries to the democratic dimension that, on the contrary, by definition, shall or should apply equally to all. The term ‘people’ equally refers to the whole life of a person living in a polity and to the marginalised of that polity. Agamben, for example, maintains that in ancient Rome, the two meanings were structurally divided (*populus* and *plebs*). He confirms that the French revolutionaries played the central role in transferring

sovereignty to the people and announcing the intolerance of their exclusion. He maintains that ‘our time is nothing other than the methodical and implacable attempt to fill the split that divides the people by radically eliminating the people of the excluded’ (Agamben 2000:32).¹⁶ Therefore, ‘people’ is a controversial concept that is defined between the two extremes of wholeness and exclusion. The complexity of ‘people’ is given by the fact that it contains its own sovereignty, but, at the same time, it is exclusionary of such sovereignty. The relationship of people and sovereignty is divided between the two poles wholeness and exclusion, it includes and excludes. That ‘is what always already is, as well as what has yet to be realized; it is the pure source of identity and yet it has to redefine and purify itself continuously according to exclusion, language, blood, and territory’ (Agamben 2000:31).

With taking a closer look at the French revolution, another aspect emerges. After the lesson of Rousseau (2002), the French revolution stipulated the primacy of the people in one sense, that is, the people as the holder of sovereign power. However, it did not adequately disputed the ambiguous conception of the people as the cultural, political and intellectual inferior mass – a vision inherited from the *ancien régime* (Ruocco 2009; Ruocco and Scuccimarra 2011). Not only did it not define that the sovereign power should remain under control of the people itself, on the contrary, it intensified the mechanism of representation to centre the execution of the sovereign power in the hand of an elite that could represent the people for the better interest of the people itself. This was also the case with the English and American revolutions (Manin 1997). Since the Atlantic revolutions, representation was defined as the instrument to bypass the ‘inferiority’ of the people as a whole, its incapacity to self-govern itself and its political dangerousness. While departing from the bi-dimensionality of the definition, i.e., people as wholeness and people as the residual part of such wholeness, the enlightenment strengthened this position which was not dismissed by the French revolution (Ruocco and Scuccimarra 2011). So while the people become the holder of the sovereign power, it included a two-faced nature: justificatory unity and the dangerous inferiority of human conditions.

¹⁶ See also the liberal objective to standardisation of the political community besides the acceptance of tolerable differences among life-views such as in (Rawls 1999).

There are therefore three answers to the question of the identity of the people: the people is: 1) the wholeness of the population, 2) the culturally, politically and intellectually inferior part of the population and 3) the political danger of the collective subjectivity considered intellectually, morally and culturally inferior. The fear of the people is reflected in the contemporary stigmatisation of terms such as populism - the danger of the representative democratic regimes (Scuccimarra 2013).

As an entity, the 'people' is not defined only in relation to its special and historical formation, but also defined for its role in shaping democracy. The 'people' is not only an historical entity or a real subject, but it is also a real – although heterogeneous, unfixed and unattainable – democratic actor. To describe this role, Rosanvallon elaborates on three concepts: 'electoral people', 'social people' and 'the people as principle' to define respectively the electoral community, the sum of protestors against a certain social order and the people of universal rights (Rosanvallon 2011a:129–32). He argues that the limited sovereignty allocated to the people by liberal democracy is counter balanced by the people performing surveillance, denunciation and evaluation/judgement as a complementary form of democratic participation and representation (Rosanvallon 2006 in particular pp. 18-23).

1.1.3 *Vagueness and diversity*

The concept of the 'people', has to be open for a number of reasons. This starts from the vagueness of the meaning and the domain of action of the people. This is what Canovan (2005) justifies, because it implies different abstract meanings (sovereign people, peoples as nations, people opposed to an elite and individuals in general) as well as a precise reference to a concrete group of people living here and now. In this ambiguity between the abstract and the concrete, 'the people' incorporates the extremes of abstraction and concreteness that pave the way for a range of use for this concept. Canovan maintains that the vagueness of the concept of 'people' is also its political potential as it is 'captured at different times by many different political causes' (Canovan 2005:3) and therefore, it is historically defined in the political conflict, by way of the real issues producing such conflict. This implies that the 'people' emerges from real individuals identified as peoples and are struggling to affirm their rights and authority. However, to identify such a group of individuals as a defined and stable collective is impossible, because such a unit is dynamic and undetermined even when

institutions claim to contain it (Rosanvallon 1998). The idea of the ‘people’ is the guiding principle to build institutional representation but it is also the point of rupture when such an idea is distant from the contingent instance of the people (Ingram 2011). The ambiguity of the ‘people’ – the distance between the idea and real people that question the representation of such idea in the real – is for Ingram the space of effectiveness of democracy, in which the real people dispute the representatives and advocate for new bottom-up forms of democratic practices. This is in substance also the opinion of Laclau (2005a).

The concept of the ‘people’ represents the necessary vagueness of democracy. Rosanvallon contends that the objective of the political is to ‘constitute an unfindable people in a living political community’ (Rosanvallon 2006:317 my translation). Attempts to define such vagueness have been predominant in Euro-centred history. The meaning of the ‘people’ in non-Eurocentric terms, has been marginalised by the preponderance of the politico-philosophical perspective of the European model that is based on the post-Westphalian state and the post-revolutionary political regime. The meaning of ‘people’ embraces a variety of knowledges, cultures, experiences and perspectives and it requires a cognitive openness, as explored by Santos, Nunes and Meneses:

Many non-Western (indigenous, rural, etc.) populations of the world conceive of the community and the relationship with nature, knowledge, historical experience, memory, time, and space as configuring ways of life that cannot reduce to Eurocentric conceptions and cultures. For instance, the definition of the identity of peoples in the non-Western world and of their collective rights tends to be strictly bound to a notion of "territoriality" associated with responsibilities in relation to a territory, which is defined as a collective of space, human groups (including both the living and their ancestors), rivers, forests, animals and plants (Santos et al. 2008:XX).

If democracy is to be considered a universally valid idea – regardless of the use of different political synonyms to refer to such an idea – it has to encompass concepts of the ‘people’ that embrace the diversity of the world, including the European concept, but shall universalise none of them.

1.1.4 Defining through time and space

Discourses on the people are historically conditioned (Calhoun 2007:84; Scuccimarra 2013:14), and therefore, the democratic discourse cannot make a European historical concept of the ‘people’ the source of undisputable legitimacy, as it takes place within the Eurocentric teleological understanding of history. Today, this kind of legitimacy would continue to exclude

all of those who are alienated from democratic debates because they are not considered people – or the people of the nation state. The reality though is that they indeed are people in the struggle for democracy, which has to pass through their own identification and recognition.

Modern European historiography has fundamental shortcomings in such a case. Referring to world-history according to Hegel, Ranajit Guha highlights these limits which previously had emerged during the Enlightenment. He affirms that this incomplete historiography connects the concept of the people with the state and maintains that only a state has nationhood. Without the state, there was no history – people without history were inferior human beings as they were not subjects of world history either – and they could therefore be subjugated. As a consequence, Guha contends that the construction of the ‘people’ has a Eurocentric origin. He affirms that such a construction does not depart from historical facts but from philosophical speculation that is based on European views that have made possible the domination of other peoples (Guha 2002). In the Eurocentric perspective, the construction of the ‘people’ outside the framework of nationhood is neutral of political significance and theoretical legitimacy. A people emerging outside this philosophical background are too easily trivialised and converted to other political entities enemy to democracy: for example, rebels, antagonists, alter-globalists, tribalists, extremists and so on. This philosophical construction has been achieved through three other terms: ‘race’, ‘nation’ and ‘ethnic origin’ (or minority). Wallerstein maintains that social scientists have used these three terms more frequently than ‘people’ as they are three modal variables of it. They indeed are three generic terms referring respectively to a ‘visible physical form’, a socio-political dimension linked to the ‘actual or potential boundaries of the state’ and a ‘cultural category’ (Wallerstein 1991:77). They are constructions used to build the meaning of people referring to the past – whose reading and interpretation is necessarily contradictory – to achieve in the present a ‘people’ as if it had no contradictions (see thesis 5 in Rancière 2001). Building a stable concept of the ‘people’ by referring to the past is impossible because ‘[a]ll tradition is invented; all identities are in some degree chosen in competition with other possible ways of forging personality and social ties’ (Calhoun 2007:164). The use of the past to build the ‘people’ is a social construction that is ever changing and instrumental:

Pastness is a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act. Pastness is a tool persons use against each other. Pastness is a central element in the socialization of individuals, in the maintenance of group solidarity, in the establishment of or challenge to social legitimation. [...] [I]t makes little difference whether we define pastness in terms of genetically continuous groups (races), historical sociopolitical groups (nations) or cultural groups (ethnic groups). They are all peoplehood constructs (Wallerstein 1991:78).

Democracy is related to the construction of the ‘people’ through all the meanings that are elaborated on above, and is indistinctively among them although without any form of positivity for any of them. This also means that democracy refers to sharing authority within and beyond the people of a state (which remains an uncertain reference), because the physical borders of a state include a diversity of people and peoples which exceed the state itself as they are physically divided into different states. A democratic understanding of the ‘people’ extends beyond the relationship with the state and finds relevance at the margins where the rights of the state can be undemocratic towards the rights of the people and where the arguments and challenges to harmonise the two are more visible (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012). The ‘people’ also includes those living in the spaces between states or the ‘borderland’, where they ‘become bordered existences fighting illiteracy, ill health, political violence and erosion of rights’ (Banerjee 2010:232).

Such a broad spectrum of contingent description and vague reference to groups of persons labelled with the word ‘people’ is the first controversial point to confront in order to unpack democracy. The sovereignty of the people is an objective that is impossible to achieve as the ‘people’ cannot be defined. However, democracy also relates to real people – concrete living persons – that actively operate in political, social, economic and cultural (inter-)spheres. These real people use the vagueness of the term the ‘people’ to orientate their activities and to create instances of the generic content of people in which a particular understanding of a people becomes concrete. In so doing, they represent the indefiniteness that is the ‘people’. For example, ‘[t]here is no single, definite, and fixed “peoplehood” which can be assumed in advance of political discussion’ (Calhoun 2007:84). In other words, representing the people is much more complex and dynamic than what it can be simplified to in a unified and homogeneous regime or system. Whatever the simplification and institutionalisation of representation is, it must come to terms with such complexity.

1.2 Limits and perspectives of representation

1.2.1 Representation and democracy

Representation implies to ‘make present again’ someone or something which is not present. Indeed it includes the paradox of making present someone or something that is both present and not present (Pitkin 1967:8–9). Representation has a controversial meaning as it is interpreted by conflicting understandings, not least of which is because it has different meanings in different contexts. Understanding representation implies ‘a way of doing justice to the various more detailed application of representation in various contexts – how the absent thing is made present and who considers it so’ (Pitkin 1967:10).¹⁷ Therefore understanding representation implies having an understanding of the ‘presence’, most often embodied by the representative, and of the ‘absence’, partially embodied by the represented – as sustained by Pitkin – but also radical absence, which is embodied in the excluded from representation. Radical absence is the analytical object of the ‘sociology of absences’ and the ‘sociology of emergences’ (Santos 2004, 2006c:13–34, 2014:164–87). Before understanding exclusion from representation, I will explore here the complexity of representation and its implications for democracy.

In her classic book *The Concept of Representation* Hanna Pitkin explores the notion in large measure and elaborates on a taxonomy of representation that is: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic and substantive. These forms of representation occur at different levels and in different situations of social life, and thus are not exclusive to politics.

More recently, she wrote the essay entitled *Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance* where she assumes that, at the time of writing her previous masterpiece, she took for granted the relationship between democracy and representation or representative government. A few decades later she acknowledges that such an assumption is misleading (Pitkin 2004:336). Arguing that democracy and representation have separate histories, she stresses that the latter emerged, as a political idea and as a top-down necessity of the King of England in order for him to be able to control and collect taxes at the local level. Pitkin

¹⁷ Saward criticises Pitkin for focusing on the representative and not on the represented and by so doing underestimating the value of ‘the active making (creating, offering) of symbols or images of what is to be represented’, which he considers of central importance in people’s construction of the object of representation (Saward 2006:300–301).

maintains that only the civil wars and revolutions of the XVIII century inverted the dynamics when the representatives of the people claimed to use representation as a means to have a voice towards the king, in order to see their local interests taken care of at a higher level. Pitkin bitterly maintains that:

Despite repeated efforts to democratize the representative system, the predominant result has been that representation has supplanted democracy instead of serving it. Our governors have become a self-perpetuating elite that rules – or rather, administers – passive or privatized masses of people. The representatives act not as agents of the people but simply instead of them (Pitkin 2004:339).

Pitkin highlights the relevance of discussing the notion of representation by starting from its ‘context’ in order to elaborate on its meanings. She maintains that her position is highly influenced by the political context in which she lives, the United States of America (USA). Referring to democracy and its birth, she acknowledges that the small scale is characteristic for participatory democracy and that ‘Democracy originated with the ancient Greeks. At least the concept did; the practice must surely have been [a] lot older in some tribes and small settlements’ (Pitkin 2004:337). If participation has a strong link with democracy, it is because it is where the people can directly express their opinion and participate in decision making. Liberal representative democracy is an attempted response to the complexity of democracy in big constituencies where direct participation is unviable.¹⁸

Representation forces democracy to become ‘indirect’ by adding an intermediate step that, as a subsidiary practice, has a triple implication: to select those who could be represented, the selection of representatives, and the representative’s activities (in the absence of the represented) or the practice of representation.

¹⁸ Donatella Della Porta makes use of the two terms (deliberative and participatory) in conjunction and simultaneously and tracks back six different denominations of normative theories of democracy where decision-making processes involve participation and fall under the deliberative umbrella: “participatory democracy”, “strong democracy”; “discursive democracy”; “communicative democracy”; “welfare democracy”; and “associative democracy” (Della Porta 2008:18). Santos refers also to “high-intensity democracy” to describe theories and practices that challenge the “low intensity” of liberal democracy. The relation between deliberation and participation is highlighted by Dryzek: “[d]eliberative democracy itself began (even if it did not end) as a theory for which democratic legitimacy depends upon the ability of *all* those subjects to a decision to participate in authentic deliberation” (2000:85). Gbikpi highlights that deliberative and participatory are undifferentiated terms to describe the new practical experiences; the quantitative dimension is referred to as participation and the qualitative dimension is referred to as deliberation (2005:108–9). The participatory dimension finds full accomplishment in the deliberative dimension (Gbikpi 2005:118–22).

Representation generally implies exclusion among those who can be represented, those who can be selected as representatives and the practice of representation (which can selectively voice some demands and not others). Since exclusion is opposite to the idea of democracy that focuses on the sharing of power, representation creates a tension with democracy, a tension that is constitutive. From its origins, this indirect rule has developed independently from democracy, as it followed a separate logic, one which was top-down, and that therefore meant that centrally nominated representatives established connections with those to be represented (taxpayers). The inversion of the representative logic occurred when demands from below started to be voiced by representatives, something that does not change the substantive triple exclusionary character of representation.

By focusing on representation in political terms, and thereby avoiding to embarking complex wider analysis of the social implications of representation, it should be easier to understand the relationship between representation and democracy.

1.2.2 *Negotiating representation*

The idea that it is impossible to think of large democracies without representation is a strong theoretical assumption that cuts across modern and contemporary political development. Researchers, such as Constant (1988), Mill (2004), Schumpeter (2003) and Dahl (1998) all argue that at minimum 'democratic theory is concerned with processes by which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over leaders' (Dahl 2006:3).¹⁹ In such a perspective, self-governance by the people is applicable only to small-scale democracy and not to modern nation-states, something with which Rousseau agrees. In the last two centuries, liberal representative democracy has evolved into what has been considered a mature model (Fukuyama 1989) whose legitimacy is guaranteed by the electoral process. This is despite the fact that it tends to neglect the interplay of its three dimensions: authorisation, identity and accountability (see also Mansbridge 2004; Santos and Avritzer 2005:XLII). The electoral process legitimises authorisation, is inconsistent in defending inclusion of identities and is limited regarding accountability.

¹⁹ See also (Bobbio 2014:cap. 7).

Urbinati and Warren (2008) extoll and exaggerate the potential of liberal representative democracy when they suggest for it to be considered not as a pragmatic alternative to the impossibility of direct democracy but rather ‘as an intrinsically modern way of intertwining participation, political judgment, and the constitution of *demoi* capable of self-rule’. Likewise, they embellish its affinity with deliberative democracy reconnecting it to the ‘ongoing process of action and reaction between institutions and society, between mistrust and legitimacy’ that is inscribed in elections (Urbinati and Warren 2008:402). However, they do opportunely underline the lack or underrepresentation of non-territorial constituencies, that is ‘those emerging from race, ethnicity, class, gender, environment, global trade, and so on’ (Urbinati and Warren 2008:396), and the non-electoral role of ‘self-authorized representatives’ who advocate the plurality of voices present in civil society and represent the interest of those who are absent from the formal political sphere. Representation is indeed a relationship between the representative and the represented. It may or may not be intentional, justified, rooted in deliberation or extorted with an expedient. It does however entitle a link which is the object of representation. Such a link is extremely dynamic and varies in strength and consistency (which is not the same as legitimacy) on the basis of a number of variables. These include identity, experience, context, authorisation, transparency, reporting, discourse (and demagogy), etc. Representation is therefore a negotiation that is going on through these and other variables.

Representativeness presupposes the identification and the identity of the subject to be represented and to be of the representative. However, as we will see next, identity is something that is not originally available but rather is something that is constantly changing and socially re-constructed. This unavailability is due to the implications of the subjective experience of the representatives as well as the social subjectivity that is built on the interpretation of historical facts – such as a certain memory – for the production of a distinct ideology. Representativeness, therefore is an ongoing negotiation, is ever changing and is defined by both the representative and the represented (although the represented tends to be more passive in the negotiation).

Saward (2006) suggests that representation is a bidirectional relationship between the represented and the representative.²⁰ He defends the point that representation has to be understood as a negotiation of 'representative claims', where the creative role of the representatives consist in advancing representative claims that create a connection with the cultural and symbolic context of the represented, and, at the same time, propose something new to gain the interest of the represented. Representative claims can be accepted or rejected by the constituency to which they are addressed. In the infinite universe of representative claims there is no space for pure representation, as '[c]laims to authentic or "true" representation remain just that — claims' (Saward 2006:313). Representation is a relationship between the representative and the represented in which the very ideas to be represented undergo a constant evolution while being represented. Moreover, the role of the representative and the represented is also influenced by the social, political and institutional rules and procedures in which the representation takes form, as 'mechanisms of representation have never simply aggregated citizens' preferences, but also formed and transformed them' (Warren and Castiglione 2004:5). There is no pure representation as the identification is always new in the making. That is, it is a continued bargaining of what has to be represented between who represents and who is represented.

The indeterminacy of the meaning of 'people' is reproduced within the constant negotiations occurring in the definition of the ever-changing identities that constitute society. Within the representative negotiation, consequently, its representation is a never-ending exercise of re-construction. Analysing the debate between Schmitt and Kelsen about parliamentary democracy and the identity of democratic people in the Weimar republic, Ragazzoni (2011) elaborates on three concepts of people and representation.

The first concept is based on Schmitt's vision of the people as a homogeneous group that implies full publicity; the people are a part of the whole by their own presence. For Schmitt, the people cannot be represented and forms of representative democracy dissolve

²⁰ For Gaxie (2003:27–43) the negotiation takes place in a market where the representative claims are detailed in different forms depending on the scale, proximity and affinity with the representatives. 'Political credit' is a symbolic credit that representatives accumulate with their electors who then repay it with the vote as well as political neutrality, participation in electoral events and other forms of support.

the identity of the people, an identity which is identified by ‘common language, shared historical destiny, traditions, goals and hopes’ (Ragazzoni 2011:14).

The second concept of the people and representation is characterised by Kelsian proceduralism, where political representation is the essential characteristic of modern democracy in which a level of pluralism is maintained thanks to the party system, parliamentary debate and majority rule.

Lastly, Ragazzoni proposes an alternative to Schmitt and Kelsen in which the people is ‘conceived as a non-institutionally organized entity expressing political judgment through the multiple channels at its disposal in the democratic public sphere’ (Ragazzoni 2011:21). In this definition, the people assumes its multi-morphism and indeterminateness and needs to be framed between the root of the social bound and the definition of social identities. In other words, the concept of the people has an implication on the concept of representation, however the interplay between the representatives and the represented, in each specific context, shapes the form in which representation is implemented and, as a consequence, the notion of the people which is mobilised as a justification.

1.2.3 *Identities, roots and options*

What is it then to be represented? Is there a people’s identity that may become the object of representation? Do the representative claims emerge abstractedly in a universe of possible claims or are they linked with horizons of identities? Mendes maintains that identities are neither abstract nor statically pre-defined; i.e., ‘[i]dentities build themselves in and by discourse, in specific historical and institutional places, in particular practical and discursive formations and by precise enunciative strategies’ (Mendes 2003a:47). He affirms that individual and social identities emerge as constructions that result from conflicting social positions and are built on the articulated – and contextualised – interaction of history, memory, narratives, discourse, culture, ideology, symbols and rituals. Moreover, identities are shaped by the indefiniteness and ever changing characteristic of all these components, which are themselves negotiated and defined in the social interaction (Mendes 2003a:17–84). The role of all these factors and the variability they possess favours the indefiniteness of social words, experiences and meanings that shape the democratic sphere, representativeness and the limit of representation inscribed in it.

As a theoretical abstraction, the social contract is the democratic root of Western modernity.²¹ This is as it provides social identification on the basis of the stable collective option to abandon the state of nature and share a certain level of mutual recognition (Santos 1998c:93). Looking at the origin of the modern social contract, it is possible to see that its root excluded the meta-identities of the great part of society along sexual and racial lines (Keating 2011). It also excluded nature and the private spheres of life (Santos 1998b:2). Among the reasons for this exclusion is the theory of individualism of the social contract which is based on self-interest (and evades the state of nature). It does not recognise all eligible persons as parties, and thereby it operates as an exclusionary selection based on identity.

Social identities are a rich constellation of components that are not restricted to morphological characteristics. They are shaped dynamically as they may be shaped through options and not merely roots. There is a difference of scale among roots and options, as roots cover 'vast symbolic territories' without mapping details, while options cover 'confined territories and short durations' with high degrees of detail (Santos 1998c:86–87). The thinking of roots relates to what represents security and is 'profound, permanent, unique, and singular'. Conversely, thinking of the options denotes dynamism and is 'variable, ephemeral, replaceable, possible and indeterminate' (Santos 1998c:86).

A social group can be represented by contrasting representatives, and while among them persists a conflict of identities. Santos states how 'roots' and 'options' operate to create identities and he stresses the multiplication of roots and options generated by globalisation (Santos 1998c:93).²² The tendency of Western modernity is to equate roots and options, and the proliferation of both intensifies such an equation that, it increases the complexity of the definition of identities. Santos also underlines that the misrecognition 'of the distinction between roots and options implies the trivialization of both', and thereby 'the present tend to be eternalized, devouring both past and future. [...] We live in a time of repetition' (Santos

²¹ For Rousseau representation is a limit of democracy because sovereignty cannot be represented: 'Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; it consists essentially in the general will, and the will cannot be represented; it is itself or it is something else; there is no middle ground. The deputies of the people, then, are not and cannot be its representatives; they are only its agents and can conclude nothing definitively' (Rousseau 2002:221).

²² See also (Santos 2014 Chapter 2) and in Portuguese (Santos 1996, 2006a:51–92) and Spanish (Santos 2006b:129–58).

1998c:96). The past and the future are thereby neutralised in their capacity to explain the existence and define identities. Social change is therefore rendered ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unnecessary’ (Santos 1998c:97). This implies that identities are defined through temporal myopia, as they are so centred on the present, have short term interest and are foreign to visionary or utopian thinking. Representation is negotiated in quite narrow (although unstable) limits and the format obliges both the representatives and the represented to exclude long term visions outside the political interest. This seems to contradict the logic at the origin of modern representation, as for Mazzini for instance, roots are the base of the national project, and he affirms that ‘principles, purposes, and rights’ that constitute a nation ‘have to rest on solid, lasting foundations’ (Mazzini 2009:48).

1.2.4 *Beyond institutions and elections*

Political representation goes beyond the institutional form inscribed in political parties and parliaments (although it can be less structured and less formal). Institutional representation tends to be comprehensive and it adapts residency as an identifying variable (and therefore excludes those who are illegally residing somewhere). For Barber, territorial representation divests people’s participation of authority, thereby inhibiting their participation. ‘[Electoral r]epresentation destroys participation and citizenship even as it serves accountability and private rights. Representative democracy is as paradoxical an oxymoron as our political language has produced; its confused and failing practice make this ever more obvious’ (Barber 2003:XXXIV).

The domain of representation in the political sphere is informed by the analytical mistake of grouping the procedure with the substance and doing so as if they have an indistinctive value. Rosanvallon highlights how elections ‘blend a principle of justification with a technique of decision’ (Rosanvallon 2011b:114) because the legitimacy of democratic regimes is provided by the rule of the majority and identifies ‘the nature of a regime with the conditions that established it’ (Rosanvallon 2011b:114).

The sovereignty of people, and its capacity to legitimise democratic procedures and decisions, is questioned by the fact that the general will is equated with the will of the majority. Such paradigms entered into crises between 1890 and 1920 when the state grew stronger with the aim of reinforcing the basic principle of the general interest through

bureaucratisation (Rosanvallon 2011b:115). In countries like France, '[e]lection and the Civil Service exam became two parallel modes of designating representatives of the social generality' (Rosanvallon 2011b:116). In the 1980s, a period characterised by the transition from modern to post-modern political communication and campaigns (see also Bentivegna 2006; Norris 2000:137–61), procedural legitimacy was questioned by the disintegration of the predictability of the political system based on ideological parties. As a result, the rule of the majority was questioned as well as the representativeness of the electoral results. The legitimising role of the minority (as opposed to the majority) grew and a substantial form of legitimacy that incorporates a plurality of visions emerged, the evaluation of political 'identification with the social generality' (Rosanvallon 2011b:116). Citizens became more demanding towards the political and administrative establishment and the '[r]eferences to values such as impartiality, pluralism, compassion, and proximity have been reinforced' (Rosanvallon 2011b:217).

For Avritzer, representation carried out by actors of civil society is pluralist and bypasses authorisation and territorial structure (Avritzer 2007). In addition, Calhoun affirms that '[s]uch intermediate associations are also the crucial defences both of distinctive identities imperilled by the normalization of the masses, and of democracy against oligarchy' (Calhoun 2007:83). Civil society represents social interests that are not transmitted by institutional representatives, done so either for their congregative argument or for collective form. Urbinati and Warren maintain that civil society representation is a democratic reaction to the electoral exclusion which 'work not on people, who are, after all, universally included through residency-based franchise, but rather on issues' (Urbinati and Warren 2008:397). Through a representation of a different kind, civil society reduces the underrepresentation of the multiple level of identities and representative claims beyond territorial bounds and the democratic limit of representation.

Formal and informal²³ institutions and associations are characterised by three methods of control. This is to ensure that the use of political and administrative power is for

²³ Rosanvallon refers primarily to formal institutions such as constitutional courts, independent councils and independent authorities. Urbinati and Warren provide a more articulated list including 'citizen juries and panels, advisory councils, stakeholder meetings, lay members of professional review boards, representations at public hearings, public submissions, citizen surveys, deliberative polling, deliberative forums, and focus groups'

the general interest and embodies substantive legitimacy. The first method is the impartiality from elected representatives, the second is the multiplication of the expression of social sovereignty (as opposed to the rule of the electoral majority), and the third method is the attention to particularity or the recognition of difference (see also Santos et al. 2008).²⁴ Substantive 'legitimacy cannot be acquired. It is forever precarious, continuously under question, and dependent on social perceptions of the actions and behaviour of institutions' (Rosanvallon 2011b:118). This emerging legitimacy is related to a 'democracy of conduct' or 'the democratic art of government' (Rosanvallon 2011b:120) in which institutional representation is under the continued scrutiny of non-political institutions, civil society and political society (Chatterjee 2004).

To conclude, representation is a form of making democracy viable for big constituencies, but its roots and progress are independent from those of democracy. While the representative exercise is dynamic and depends on social identities and claims, it does also influence those identities and claims in return. Apart from non-institutional forms enriching representation such as civil society it is possible to see that throughout this bidirectional process, democracy is challenged by the exclusion produced by elections as opposed to participation.

1.3 Political elitism

1.3.1 *Formal and substantive dimensions*

The complexity of the concepts of the 'people' and 'representation' brings in a vast array of interpretations regarding the meaning and form that liberal representative democracy could or should assume. It also opens up the political sphere – the space in which the democratic concept, amongst others, is disputed – to the struggle for the affirmation of competing definitions of democracy. Below, we will better understand the term 'demodiversity' which Santos has adopted to indicate the co-existence of various forms of democracy in different world contexts (Santos 2006c:39). The range of definitions is diverse, even within a shared conceptual framework – such as the modern Western state. Different

(Urbinati and Warren 2008:405). It is also important to include social movements, informal associations, citizens' initiatives, social groups, and all permanent or transitory forms of political and social mobilisation.

²⁴ 'Different forms of oppression or domination also produce distinct forms of resistance, mobilisation, subjectivity and of collective identity' (Santos and Nunes 2004a:46).

political actors who dispute the political sphere, pertain to different disciplines as well as different professional and institutional domains, and increase the extension and intensity of the dispute about definitions of democracy.

Debates about democracy account for the discursive difference between formal and substantive democracy. Instrumentalism, as well as misalignment in terms of clearly defining what is the subject of the dispute, i.e., defining the terms of discussion in relation to form and substance to avoid confusion among the two, hardens the debate. Distinguishing social from political democracy, Bobbio asks: 'is it possible for a democratic state to survive in a non-democratic society? This can also be formulated in another way: political democracy has been and continues to be necessary to prevent a nation falling prey to a despotic regime. But is it enough?' (Bobbio 1987:56).²⁵ We shall respond negatively to this question by affirming that democratisation of politics and society are part of the same process of achieving democracy, which can be translated as follows – the formal and substantive dimension both contribute to the democratisation of democracy. As we are about to see, the history of modern democracy has mostly developed the formal (institutional) dimension.

The process of the democratisation of politics is a continuous evolution and it therefore does not make sense to search for a perfect form of political democracy that may be applied everywhere and at all times. More or most importantly, it is the validity of political democracy that needs to be measured against the quality of social democracy, as it is social democracy that it makes possible.

Democratisation implies that both politics and society in polities with democratic politics (because their regime is democratic in form or substance). In order to discuss this, we can talk to the 'democratisation of democracy'. So the question then is: what does democratisation mean? Santos and Avritzer respond to this question by stating that it implies the democratisation of life in public and private spheres that include 'household-place, workplace, community-place, marketplace, citizen-place, and world-place' (Santos and

²⁵ Bobbio refers also to formal (universal suffrage, representative system and majoritarian principle) and substantial democracy (compulsory education, social security and progressive taxation system), and that the second is less developed than the first (Bobbio 2014:cap. 5).

Avritzer 2005:LXII, more below). This implies to democratise society in all its spheres, not only the political (citizen-place and world-place).

Bobbio focused on the political democratisation by accepting a shared definition of procedural democracy characterised ‘by a set of rules (primary or basic) which establish who is authorised to take collective decisions and which procedures are to be applied’ (Bobbio 1987:24). The centrality of the vote and the election of representatives is also at the core of Schumpeter’s definition, which states ‘the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’ (Schumpeter 2003:269). This formal and essentialist definition concerns political democracy or democracy within public institutions, i.e., the state. However, although it does this it helps little to define democracy within society, something that is much wider and that embraces both the worldview and life practice characterised by shared authority. For Santos and Avritzer democracy applies within and without the political realm, as ‘democracy concerns the quality of human experience and the social relations that it makes possible. It can be defined as the entire process through which unequal power relations are replaced by relations of shared authority’ (Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXII). Keeping the reference to the formal dimension, Bobbio confirms the substance of this definition:

Democratic theory is directed against autocratic power, i.e. power from above, and maintains that the remedy to this type of power can only be power from below. Pluralist theory is directed against monocratic power, i.e. power concentrated in the hands of one person, and maintains that the remedy for this type of power lies in its proper distribution (Bobbio 1987:59).

Bernard Manin (1997) presents a history of modern Western liberal representative democracy by identifying three ideal-types of representative government. He defines these as ‘parliamentarism’, ‘party-democracy’ and ‘audience democracy’. His essay is internationally renowned for the proposal of the third ideal type, ‘audience democracy’ presented as the paradigm of mass-media and personalised democracy. However, the most interesting part of his analysis lies elsewhere. In fact, Manin excellently demonstrated that liberal representative democracy has been created as an elitist venture since the English, American and French revolutions and has stayed so up until the present day. Manin defines the ‘principle of distinction’ (Manin 1997:94–131) the project after which the political elite shall be socially

superior (in terms of wealth, talent or virtue) with respect to wider society. Manin shows how this principle has always been protected by formal democracy. Representative elitism is a fundamental passage way with which to penetrate the history, concept and practice of liberal representative democracy.

1.3.2 Representative elitism

George Orwell in his famous novel *1984* wrote:

The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain world-view and a certain way of life, imposed by the dead upon the living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. WHO wields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same (Orwell 2004:287).

The issue of oligarchies and political elites is endemic to modern liberal democratic regimes. The historical review of the development of democracy made by Dino Costantini (2012) proposes a dualism between two groups of political theorists. The first advocates for the supremacy of a dominant group of people (bourgeoisie, elite) over the majority of the people, based on the persuasion that the people (or masses) cannot govern themselves. We refer to this as the 'elitist' approach. Thinkers of the second group defend instead the necessity of keeping the people as the core of the democratic exercise. This is what we call here the 'self-rule' approach.

The dualism between the elitist and the self-rule approach was elucidated in the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' by Marx (1970), who advocated for the capacity of self-determination of the people and the supremacy of civil society over law and the state (see also Held 2006:96–122). In Hegel (1991), the state is a superior entity with respect to the people over whom it governs. For Hegel, the state encompasses and regulates civil society, whereas, for Marx, civil society has the power to define its own constitution, which is crystallised through state institutions. Marx's perspective subverts the predominance of the state in favour of the self-determination of the people.

Costantini suggests that the philosophical dualism between state and civil society serves as a draft for the line between elitist and self-rule views. The former defends the pre-ordered dominance of the social and political elite, thereby advocating the protection of the

institutional order of the state. The latter considers civil society as the legitimate holder of the right to define democratic institutions and processes that are manifested in forms that are always amendable by the people. The debate on the development of democracy as a political regime in the last three centuries shows how the confrontation between these two positions has emerged with a remarkable dominance by the elitist view, which, until today, defines the theoretical and empirical forms of democracy as we know them in the liberal representative model. This next section is largely informed by the research of Costantini and explores the historical trajectory of political elitism.

Constant (1988) and Tocqueville (2010) approach the question of the division of the elite from the people, and do so by expressing a concrete fear that the masses could come to power and mix-up political leadership through ignorance. Marx (Marx 1904, 1970; Marx and Engels 2008) highlighted the polarisation of the democratic concept that was emerging from the conservative perspective along with the fact that the elite did not represent the interests of the whole of society but rather defended their own. In such a view, the American and French revolutions have produced a formal democratisation, although not yet in a substantive sense. Formal democracy is a system of institutions that has democratic legitimacy but limits participation in the democratic life of the people, whereas substantive democracy instead searches to make the will of the people effective in democratic decision-making.

Weber (1994a, 1994b, 1994e, 1994d, 1994c) enriches the formal democracy model with an analysis of the risk from which he concludes that bureaucratic rationalisation would de-humanise democracy and make it a purely administrative rather than a political affair. In his view, modern democracy has to limit the excess of bureaucratisation via an active politics devoted to the interest of the nation by political parties in the parliament and under the guidance of a charismatic leader. The leader, whose charisma is measured by the support and level of social obedience among the citizenry, has the visionary role of keeping the nation and its political leadership active and focused on national prosperity. The parliament is subdued by the leader and provides the mediating space for different social views that are transmitted by political parties that filter social diversity and conflicting democratic aspirations through debates with a focus on the interest of the nation. Political equality is achieved via universal suffrage which also serves the purpose of directing social instincts towards the interest of the

nation (Costantini 2012:50–52). While the elitism of Constant and Tocqueville was informed by the fear of self-rule by the masses, Weber structures a more Hegelian elitist concept based on the nation as superior and unitary interest.

The elitist approach to democracy arose in its philosophical formulation in the first half of XX century. However, it was not fully exhausted at this time and indeed it further developed after this phase. An elitist approach to democracy was developed further by other political thinkers such as Schumpeter and Kelsen as we will see below.

The classical stream of thoughts known as political elitism was first elaborated through the theoretical perspective expounded by Mosca, Pareto and Michels. Mosca (1939) stressed the political fact of the inescapable presence of an elite and that society is divided between the ruler and the ruled. Legitimation of this elite came from external sources (e.g., God gave the mandate to the King). In democracy, this mandate shall come from the people, and thus the need for elections. In the most advanced democracies, elites are chosen through a meritocratic process, despite this process however, they remain oligarchic. He further argues that a good government defends the freedom of the citizens and social order, and builds on a shared moral base. Pareto (1935) highlights that all historical societies were dominated by elites. However, different elites have adopted different forms to incorporate the best of the governed among the governors. Pareto does not believe in political evolutionism, in which in order to be supported, elites would necessarily bring about social amelioration. Rather, the history of elites shows a wave of motion, in so far that elites can have a positive or a negative influence on society. The modern parliament is the seat of the elites' power and democratic theory serves to justify the power of a specific elite. For Michels (1915) the masses are formless and politically passive, and therefore they need to be organised. Political parties take up this role, as their organisation is pyramidal under the direction of a leader. Elections are the tribute to formal equality and are the expression and annihilation of people's sovereignty. Professional political leadership is based on the oratory capacity. Political power is strengthened by experience on the one hand, while, on the other hand, experience produces an estrangement from ideals and an increase of power yearning.²⁶

²⁶ On the profession of politicians see also Gaxie (2003:144–50)

Beyond the formation and renovation of elites, liberal democracy maintains the link between the representatives and the represented, where the former are held responsible to operate on behalf of to the latter. For instance, after the Second World War the 'people' were punished for having supported Nazi and Fascists regimes. Procedural democracy was assigned enriched systems of checks and balances to prevent further deviations due to the fact that both the fascist and Nazi governments demonstrated that non-democratic regimes could be designated through elections.

Democracy was still the power of the demos, but the demos was now only one component of democracy. Constitutionalism – that is, the development of counterweights to the unbalanced supremacy of the people – developed rapidly: enforceable human rights, constitutional courts, the territorial and functional division of powers, and the autonomy of the central banks all became key features of the new regimes. However, not all systems adjusted smoothly to this new order and to this revised view of democracy, particularly where radical or extremist parties challenged the new political arrangements (Mény and Surel 2002b:10).

Fascism is an extreme deviation of political elitism, while political-colonialism entitles subtler forms of elitism accompanied by social fascism (more below). Different mechanisms and devices are introduced in order to limit the abuse of power and expand participation within the minimalist, procedural and elitist models of liberal democratic regimes. These include: parties, unions, institutional custom, associations, and systems of checks and balances. Besides the fact that these mechanisms exist in different forms and degrees in different regimes, they also have a contradictory role as they reduce, co-opt or negate the participation they should allow. Liberal representative regimes translate in the rule of those who master the condition of legitimating the ruling elite. The consequence is that the condition of legitimation includes a certain degree of liberal and democratic actions. This is incidental and is not an essential aspect. Liberal representation would function regardless of this legitimation, which, in turn, justifies it as a political-colonial regime where the elite (colonizer) rules over the society (colonised). This is because the legitimation is not democratic but rather is controlled by the elites that compete to be legitimised. For instance, the basic democratic level of the rules of legitimation, that is, the electoral law, depends on the kind of elite formation aimed by those who formulate them. We see evidence of this in the stable

democracies of the five European Nordic regimes (Grofman and Lijphart 2002b)²⁷ as well as in the ‘liberalising’ (although not yet incorporating more comprehensive liberal democratic standards) countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa (Lust-Okar and Jamal 2002).

1.3.3 *From elitism to proceduralism*

The elitist model that was concretised after the Second World War is characterised by two main assumptions: ‘first, that in order to be preserved, democracy must narrow the scope of political participation; and second, that the only way to make democratic decision-making rational is to limit it to elites and restrict the role of the masses to that of choosing between elites’ (Avritzer 2002:14–15).

Hans Kelsen serves as a reference for the development of the formal procedural model of democracy as characterised by the centrality of elections. Santos and Avritzer (2005) argue that his proceduralism (Kelsen 1955, 2000) reduces democratic legitimacy to democratic legality and aims at articulating moral relativism with forms of dispute resolution and conflict management. For Kelsen, political parties act as instruments to group the political perspectives of the citizens and to make them effective. Santos and Avritzer maintain that Schumpeter and Bobbio developed Kelsen’s proceduralism into democratic elitism. As mentioned above, Schumpeter (2003) argues that self-governance by the people is applicable only to small-scale democracy and not to modern nation-states, and therefore, democracy implies the selection of political leadership via elections.

The indefinite character of democratic foundations, such as people and representation, the indefinability of the common good and the impossibility of achieving equality due to irreconcilable inequalities, moved Schumpeter to maintain that the political elite determines the political discourse. Schumpeter concentrates on ‘real democracy’, that is, a system to achieve political decisions by electing those who will take decisions. The relevance of proceduralism, such as according to Schumpeter, is to harmonise the ontological

²⁷ Grofman and Lijphart maintain that ‘[i]n the Nordic nations we find clear evidence for attempts to use electoral system changes for partisan advantage, but parties usually lack the power to implement the electoral laws they would most prefer and most electoral changes reflect political compromises among members of a political coalition. We also find that the timing of most transitions to a new electoral era can often be attributed to changes in party balance and bargaining power at least as much or more than to changes in the perceptions of relative party advantage’ (Grofman and Lijphart 2002a:9).

justification of the elites with democracy (Avritzer 2002:16–19). In this view, the people elect their representatives and are otherwise politically passive as they leave the political work to the elected leaders. Moreover, the government is not compelled to represent the people as a whole, but rather, it should govern and respect the will of the majority of the voters that have determined its election. Electoral laws should favour the creation of a majority and limit political fragmentation that could curtail the governability. Bobbio articulates the theory for the formation of the majority and confirms that democracy is mainly a procedural form to achieve a political leadership and to define the way of its action (Bobbio 1987:24).

While the democratic perspective increasingly identified itself with a form to essentially represent the plurality of the people within the stability of the government, the conditions for its smooth functioning became increasingly mainstream. Lipset (1994) listed the conditions of liberal democracy including the Western-centrist approach. This is an elitist view where institutions are based on a parliamentary system, a two party system and electoral validation. He further affirms that democracy is sustained by individualism and must be based on capitalism, a weak state and a strong market. While liberal democracy spread a system of government that enables the leadership of society, it has brought upon itself increased criticism, as it has become the hegemonic form of conceiving democracy for representative regimes. The elitist approach hegemonises the formulation of political regimes and hides societal divisions and undemocratic rule. Rancière denounces the abuse of the term and of the concept:

[W]e live in societies and States known as “democracies”, a term by which they are distinguished from societies governed by States without law or with religious law. How are we to understand that, at the heart of these “democracies”, a dominant intelligentsia, whose situation is not obviously desperate and who hardly aspire to live under different laws, day in day out blame all of humanity's misfortunes on a single evil they call democracy? (Rancière 2006:71).

Sealing the law within a political regime (be it democratic or not), to a general principle of humanity, proves to be deleterious for the real human beings regulated by such law. In the first place, it is exclusionary with regards to those considered external to the perimeter of such law, as for instance, migrants against whom law becomes an ‘immunity system’ limiting the states and the citizens’ responsibility towards the ‘others’ (Marci 2001:243). However, the fracture goes beyond the legal domain and expands within liberal

democratic regimes through ‘social fascism’, that is ‘a social regime of extremely unequal power relations which grant the stronger party a veto power over the life and livelihood of the weaker party’ (see also Santos 1998b and below, 2007a:58–59).

1.3.4 *Crisis of ‘political liberalism’ or ‘a concept of state’*

The distinction between the liberal and democratic pillars that constitute liberal democratic regimes, is well elucidated by Giovanni Sartori. He affirms that theoretically ‘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). Outlining the form developed in the liberal democratic tradition, Sartori affirms that liberal democratic regimes build on two spheres: constitutional and social. The former is assigned to liberalism (responsible for defining the form of the state) and therefore limits the role of democracy (i.e., people’s power in the state). The latter is the domain of democracy that regulates economic wellbeing and social equality. In other words, in liberal democratic regimes, the political is the sphere of liberalism and the social is the sphere of democracy. Several political theorists share this view.²⁸ Sartori affirms that ‘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). With this effective definition, the spirit of proceduralism and elitist democracy maintains that the political is not the space of equal power relations but rather is the space to limit the powers

²⁸ Sartori affirms that the democratic State is liberal-constitutional: constitutionalism – as the structure to limit State power – is the domain of liberalism. Liberal-constitutionalism is a pre-condition for democracy in Sartori’s view. The distinction between liberal/constitutional pillar and the social/democratic pillar is widely accepted by intellectuals. Mény and Surel (2002b) apply a similar distinction defining the two pillars of democratic regimes as popular democracy and constitutionalism. Popular democracy 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. The constitutional pillar is concerned with the form of the State and is the space of liberalism as identified by Sartori. Likewise, Habermas refers to the informal role of civil society in the public sphere while the State’s institutions are the pillar of the political system (Habermas 1996). Fukuyama (1992:43–44) maintains that ‘Liberalism and democracy, while closely related, are separate concepts. Political liberalism can be defined simply as a rule of law that recognizes certain individual rights or freedoms from government control. [...] Democracy, on the other hand, is the right held universally by all citizens to have a share of political power, that is, the right of all citizens to vote and participate in politics’. Chatterjee refers to the same two categories as governmentality and popular sovereignty, as ‘The opposition, I will argue, is symptomatic of the transition that occurred in modern politics 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).

of the state (in defence of individual liberty).²⁹ This is the mainstream form of the political regime that emerged as the factual political regime of Western modernity, the form of Western liberal representative democratic regimes. In different contexts, different definitions are used as synonyms of Western representative democracy, such as liberal democracy, representative democracy, or simply democracy, regardless of the imprecision of this interchange of uses.

Multiple symptoms of a political crisis are evident. These include the factual political gap between the elite and society, the increasing feeling of misrepresentation or the lack of representation of the people, the dissatisfaction of people with the political regime, and the low voter turnout in elections. However, it is incorrect to name this the ‘crisis of democracy’, and it is imprecise to name it the ‘crisis of representation’. Rather, it is correct to understand it as the ‘crisis of liberal-representative democratic regimes’ and, more precisely, as the ‘crisis of political liberalism’.

The crisis consists of the fact that the liberal constitutional pillar fails to bring the principle of equality within the political sphere because it consolidates the elitist and procedural regime that has been developed since the XVII century. In other words, the political crisis questions the relation of liberalism and democracy, the strength of the representative principle, abstention from the vote, disillusionment with the political elite and alienation of society from politics. This questioning can be seen as a democratic response to the failure of the liberal pillar to democratise access to political power and to hold the elite accountable (Santos and Avritzer 2005). In this sense the political crisis is therefore a crisis of political liberalism, something rooted in the history of liberal democracy and stretched by neoliberalism.

As outlined above, the understanding of democracy from which we depart is the horizontality of power relations. We have seen above that democracy was expelled from the political sphere (apart from the mere electoral exercise) and that, more precisely, Western

²⁹ 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 not a little 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).

modernity never allowed the democratic pillar to penetrate the liberal constitutional pillar. Power was generally held by elites and never by the people, not even indirectly, because imperative mandates were abolished since the French revolution, so that once elected, the elite are subject to the system of 'check and balance' of the liberal pillar, but they are independent from the democratic pillar.³⁰

Democracy is not more in crisis now with respect to the past of the modern liberal representative paradigm, because it was never actually implemented directly or indirectly within the state institutional framework. As Sartori outlines, political power has ever since been hold by elites and never actually by the people. The political (as opposed to the social) is the sphere of liberalism. Therefore the 'political' crisis concerns liberalism, which is the procedural system of government legitimised by elections – elections that do not imply that liberalism and democracy become synonymous, but that rather just serve to legitimise the liberal pillar through one single democratic exercise.³¹ The crisis of liberalism concerns the

³⁰ The French doctrine was inspired by Sieyès (2003) and incorporated in the 1791's constitution (tit. III, cap. I, sect. 3 art. 7). Van der Hulst traces the difference between popular sovereignty and national sovereignty with the free mandate as the guarantee of the national vs. imperative mandate as guarantor of popular sovereignty (Hulst 2000:6–11). Imperative mandates have been generally objected because they defend 'particular interest' against the 'general interest'. The main argument being that the representatives should represent the whole nation and not merely their constituency; otherwise, nobody would represent the nation as a whole (see also Bobbio 2014 par. 8.3.3). Another reason against binding mandates is primarily elitist in understanding political issues as better dealt with by experts rather than all citizens because of their complexity, therefore representatives need to be free to act according to their interpretation of the general interest. Finally, the technical impossibility to consult constituencies at times of taking decisions, the range of areas on which to decide and the rapidity of parliamentary debates and voting is not considered combinable with imperative mandates. On this last point, the increasing number of technological innovations may provide an answer although the debate is extremely delicate. Bobbio (1987:28–30) defends the principle against imperative mandates although affirming that it is largely violated by party politics and party discipline. The democratic pillar is limited to the elections by which political decision-making power transfers from citizens to the representative, representatives are not bound to be represented by their mandate but *de facto* they are bound to the party who gives orientation for parliamentary decisions. But parties are not bound to internal democracy and generally their structures are not based on a substantial level of democracy, therefore the liberal pillar entitles an undemocratic process.

³¹ Beyond the global North, liberals are preoccupied with the propagation of democracy through the pure diffusion of elections. Huntington's pupil Zakaria (1997) maintains that liberalism validates democracy and that democracy without liberalism is undesirable. He defends liberal elitism assessing that elections may bring illiberal regimes and insists that the liberal constitutional pillar (which he defines the procedure to define government's goals) should be strengthened in order to shrink the democratic one and the possibility of the people to elect the wrong elite. Besides measuring democracy in barely quantitative terms – through the electoral process – Zakaria reads recent non-western history to show that the emergence of illiberal regimes is increasing, therefore he maintains that people should not be trusted without a strong liberal pillar is established to limit their possibility to elect illiberal leaders. He proudly confirm this assumption when he affirms '[w]hat is distinctive about the American system is not how democratic it is but rather how undemocratic it is, placing as it

increased dissatisfaction of the people with this form of government, and it is reflected in the critical assessment on its proceduralism, elitism and representative system.³²

To put this argument another way, the so-called ‘democratic crisis’ concerns representation. This is because, beyond legitimation through elections, it is not democratic and it concerns liberalism as for example the issue of divesting democracy of political authority (to define power relations within state institutions) and is unable to grant the exercise of democracy (at least in the social and economic sphere), as it occurred in the past. It is the crisis of liberal constitutionalism where the primary rule to protect individual liberties from the state’s abuse of power diverted the participation in political institutions from popular to elitist. As a result, mistrust amongst the people who are denied self-rule increases. While mass parties and worker unions granted a space of participation to the political, the neoliberal accent of individualism fragmented the residual participatory character of these organisations and increased the viciousness of procedural elitism. The withdrawal of the welfare state accentuated the effects of ‘social fascism’ and thereby reduced the residual role (social equality and economic redistribution) accorded by Sartori to democracy in society. Santos maintains that ‘[t]he political obligation binding the legal subject to the *Rechtsstaat*, the modern constitutional State, which has prevailed on this side of the line, is being replaced by privatized, depoliticized contractual obligations under which the weaker party is more or less at the mercy of the stronger party’ (Santos 2007a:58). The crisis of liberalism is the radicalisation of the supremacy of the market, where private contractualism (official/legitimate or subtle/corruption) prevails over the spirit of equality inbuilt in democracy. Confronted with this evidence, people have increasingly refused to participate in

does multiple constraints on electoral majorities’ (Zakaria 1997:39). In other words for Zakaria the quality of a liberal democratic regime is measured with the measure of limitations that the liberal pillar is able to exercise over the democratic pillar (besides minimalist identified with elections).

³² Manent (2014) refers to the crisis of liberalism concerning globalisation. He maintains that liberalism was historically the condition of European domination in the world and that Globalisation, led by the United States, is the last form of such domination (new colonialism) which is today in crisis because the European economies no longer can compete in the world market. For Manent, at the international level, political liberalism follows the western weaknesses within global economic liberalism. Another fugitive aspect of Manent’s analysis is interesting, as he highlights liberalism as good governance, but this however, confirms that the crisis of liberal democracies evidently does not have to do with the people but with the governing elite. In this declination the crisis of political liberalism relates to the incapacity of the liberal pillar to protect individual liberties of its citizens against the private interests of big corporations.

the liberal ritual of elections. This implies that people renounce themselves to their position of minority in the contractual market, and express the dissatisfaction with the undemocratic character of the liberal representative regimes that are increasingly unable to protect democracy in the social dimension.

The democratic waves of 2011, starting in the Maghreb region and expanding to other continents, originated as an aspiration to democratic contractualism (i.e., in northern Africa) and matured in the criticism of liberal constitutionalism and contractualism (in liberal representative democratic regimes). This epiphenomenon was the solidification of a long lasting discontent with political liberalism which embraces Western 'advanced industrial democracies' (Dalton 2004)³³ as well as Latin American countries (López et al. 2012), whose progressive governments attempted to provide responses (Brighenti and Mezzadra 2012), as did 'most of the world'³⁴ in this 'heterogeneous time of modernity' (Chatterjee 2004:7–8).

The 'worldwide liberal revolution' implies that '[e]ven non-democrats will have to speak the language of democracy in order to justify their deviation from the single universal standard' (Fukuyama 1992:45). It also brings a different reaction to the diffusion of liberal democratic regimes,³⁵ insisting on the democratic force, a new aspiration, an aspiration that goes beyond the liberal constitutional *status quo* and seeks the radicalisation of democracy.

The anthropologist and activist of the *Occupy Wall Street* movement, David Graeber, describes this aspiration as the 'revival of the revolutionary imagination that conventional wisdom has long since declared dead' (Graeber 2013 introduction). He maintains that the economic crisis which started in 2007 accelerated a transformation that (in the USA) was

³³ See also the report of the Council of Europe on the 'State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe' (Jagland 2014).

³⁴ The diffusion of the modern liberal canon does not imply that it has been incorporated evenly everywhere, nor that reactions to it are equally passive, quite the contrary. Adelman maintains that 'there is a widespread tendency to equate democracy with liberal capitalism in a way that reinforces the cultural imperialism to which the developing world has long been subjected. Individualism thus takes precedence of the more communal histories of African societies, with civil and political rights accorded priority over social, economic and cultural rights.' (Adelman 1998:75). Wiredu advocates for a form of hybrid democracy between modern constitutionalism and the traditional form of democracy based on consensus in African traditions (Wiredu 1999).

³⁵ Fukuyama recognises the weaknesses of the liberal paradigm, but holds on to it as to avoid contentions that are more 'undemocratic': 'Democratic procedures can be manipulated by elites, and do not always accurately reflect the will or true self-interests of the people. But once we move away from a formal definition, we open up the possibility of infinite abuse of the democratic principle' (Fukuyama 1992:43).

ongoing for decades and that was increasing social difference.³⁶ The middle class shrinks while the distance from the political elite has increased involving institutions of security, education, health and economics. This transformation is due to the ‘financialization of capitalism’, which implies a ‘collusion between government and financial institutions’ that increases the debts of the citizens and isolates the representative proceduralism from social issues. This form assumes what Santos defines as ‘low-intensity democracy’:

Democracy is extremely low-intensity when it 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 2006c:41).

There is another, higher, level crisis of liberalism that has been considered within the meta-theoretical political perspective and that embraces political theory beyond ideological distinctions. Milbank and Pabst maintain that ‘the 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). The two liberalisms mutually reinforce each other and foster ‘economic-political individualism with bureaucratic-managerial collectivism and social-cultural atomisation’ (Milbank and Pabst 2015), this erodes social bonds and makes society dependent on the market which reduces individual and social freedom of self-realisation. Milbank and Pabst affirm that liberal pluralism has ruled truth and goodness to be ‘out of the question’ from public debate, due to the potential intolerance and oppressiveness of related doctrines, create an ideological barrier towards positive liberty – that includes a spiritual dimension – and produces a materialist reductionism. Abandoning the fullness of humanity with its materialist reductionism, liberalism entered 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’

³⁶ Dalton (2004) maintains that the crisis of the liberal democratic regimes is mostly suffered by those who have most benefitted from democratic progress, those highly educated and affluent, because their high democratic expectations face the democratic and policy gap. He maintains that ‘in contrast to previous periods of political dissatisfaction when democracy itself was under challenge, such as during the inter-war period and the anti-system assaults following the Second World War, the present questioning of government often comes from those who strongly adhere to the democratic creed’ (Dalton 2004:192).

(Milbank and Pabst 2015). The political crisis of liberalism as a lack of political participation and the meta-crisis of liberalism as a materialist emphasis on power and wealth, both find a response in Gandhi's vision of democracy articulated through a civilisational worldview, something which is elaborated on in the next chapter.

1.4 *Populism, a thread and a chance*

1.4.1 *Not just a reaction, a general political form*

The crisis of political liberalism, proceduralism and elitism maintains a form of misalignment between people's democratic aspirations and those of the political elite. When political parties and political elites show a clear and fracturing distance from those who they should represent, the unsatisfied represented search elsewhere for a form to rebuild the representative link. Populism promotes the idea that representation can be different than what it is, and that it is possible to re-establish the participation of the people within the institutional system beyond the vote. The ambiguous presence of a charismatic leader represents the hope that exists for a different non-elitist political system (Santos 2016). However, it is reductive to identify populism with a charismatic leader and to, as some of the so-called populist movements or parties do, respond to the representative delusion by expanding participation. In the blurred space opened up by populist claims takes place a great deal of bargaining between demagogy and participation, and it is doubtful to restrict the analysis on one of these two extremes. What is especially suspicious is the use of populism as a negative ideological tool being mobilised by the establishment to disqualify emerging political forces.

Populism is not a political category, but it identifies a range of concepts and features that are generally and unsystematically grouped together to describe different phenomena (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013; Taggart 2000). In short, Populism is a controversial label, a descriptive term used with very different accepted meanings in different political contexts. Originating in XIX century Russia and the USA, it identified the struggle for the rights and interests of farmers and their inclusion in the area of representation (Canovan 1981; Collovald 2004, 2005). The acceptance of the term was originally related to a valorisation of the people, especially the more vulnerable. It identified the true spirit of democracy, that is, power shared

of, by and for the People,³⁷ an acceptance that is almost the opposite of the mainstream meaning assigned to the term during the last three decades and increasingly so in Europe (Tarchi 2015:7–17).³⁸ In India, the term is no less controversial and is used to indicate popular mobilisation and policies benefitting the more marginalised social groups. It may at times, however, be coupled with authoritarian regimes such as Indira Gandhi’s state of exception (Subrahmaniam 2014; Wyatt 2013).

Suresh Sharma associates the controversial character of the term with two main characteristics. First, the desire of politicians to be accepted by the people, from which it derives the idea of demos and participation to politics. Second, the negative acceptance characterised by a tendency of simplification, unrealistic promises, abolition of institutional mediation and the unquestionability of the leader (interview with Suresh Sharma). The ambiguity of the acceptations of the term ‘populism’ in Europe and in India ranges around the same parameters, besides the fact that it applies to very diverse political subjects.³⁹

Populism, is a term that is used to identify different concrete movements that are contradictory and ambiguous (at times very much so), that it can be applied to an extremely wide range of political actors of any political orientation. At the Venice-Delhi seminars of 2014, which were dedicated to the topic ‘Minorities and the Global Populist Tide’, the term was used for the so called ‘populist movements’ of the extreme right, as well as for more recent

³⁷ The trilateral commission report of 1975 also uses this acceptance ‘The democratic spirit is egalitarian, individualistic, populist, and impatient with the distinctions of class and rank. The spread of that spirit weakens the traditional threats to democracy posed by such groups as the aristocracy, the church, and the military.’ However the commission straightforwardly underlined that too much democracy is deleterious: ‘a pervasive spirit of democracy may pose an intrinsic threat and undermine all forms of association, weakening the social bonds which hold together family, enterprise, and community’ (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975:162).

³⁸ The current and most diffused acceptance of populism in Europe was defined in the 1980s by European scholars such as Taguieff (Collovald 2004:25, 79–80; Taguieff 1984) who used it to describe the extreme right party of the National Front (*Front National* - FN). However scholars are aware that ‘[s]imply looking at the far right manifestation of populism in contemporary Europe misses much of the picture’ (Taggart, 2004). Populism is outlined as a demagogic manipulation of the people by the ability of a leader who opposes the political elite and establishes a direct, unmediated communication with the people. As a theoretical and demagogic consequence the so-considered ‘non-populist politicians’ and parties are franchised as those legitimised to represent the spirit of democracy.

³⁹ Santos (2016) identifies four populist ambiguities: 1) the people as oppressed class and the people as wholeness of all classes; 2) the anti-system vocation cannot exist outside the system; 3) left-right differentiation is negated by, but re-emerges in, among populist phenomena; 4) call for participation can be exclusionary of those allegedly not entitled to participate, such as the immigrants.

movements such as the 'Aam Aadmi Party' (Party of the common persons) in India, 'Podemos' in Spain and 'Movimento 5 Stelle' in Italy. During the same discussion, populism was also used for conventional political leaders, such as Silvio Berlusconi, Matteo Renzi and Narendra Modi, who represent a political class that holds stable governing or oppositional posts in Italy and India.⁴⁰ In other words, populism was not meant to relate to a specific or a definable political subjectivity, rather it was used to describe a method implied by political or popular leaders or movements, to conquer electoral support (see Taggart 2000:107; Žižek 2008:268). Taguieff (1998:12–15) questions, why is it so that populism is used as a synonym of demagogy?⁴¹

Political and sociological scholars increasingly study populism. Mudde maintains that we live in the 'populist Zeitgeist' as populism is part of politics of Western democracies and it is a thin-cantered ideology that can combine with other ideologies of the left and the right (Mudde 2004).⁴² Canovan maintains that 'populism is a shadow cast by democracy itself' (Canovan 1999:3), while Panizza sustains that it is the mirror of democracy, that can

⁴⁰ Marco Revelli published an essay entitled 'Inside and against' (Dentro e contro 2015) arguing that the Italian prime minister Renzi creates a form of 'governmental populism' focused on fostering the competitiveness of Italy in the global market. As a consequence, the urgency of neoliberal reforms push the necessity that the government is able to take decisions and the political demand of concentration of powers – in defence of the principle of governability. The prime minister advocates a direct relation with the people that results in the diminution of the role of other social and institutional bodies (such as unions and parties); this relation is operationalised with attentive stimulation and response to people's opinion (use of surveys).

⁴¹ Taguieff elaborates on the existence of two demagogies present under the label of populism: the anti-populist demagogy and the populist demagogy (Taguieff 1998). On the one hand, the adoption of the label of populism by moderate and conservative political forces is used to denigrate emerging political forces. The appeal to the people is enough to denigrate political enterprises, without considering their proposal, and is a form of delegitimising those social groups holding a weaker position in power relations (Collovald 2004:77–78). Unveiling the populist ambiguity is also fruitful for a reverse reason because Populism not only can diminish but can also legitimise political actors in the democratic debate. Annie Collovald (2004) and Alfio Mastropaolo (2005:48–64) propose a critical reading of the use made of the term and its inadequacy to describe the right wing. Without assuming an apologetic position towards the term, Collovald demonstrates how the intellectual and political elites provide an entry space to the extreme right's party in the democratic arena and underestimate its fascist and racist ideology. Similar to what the French media and the intellectual elite has done and is doing in France, in other political contexts the political experiences which do not comply with the parameters of the re-legitimation of representation, are disqualified as demagogic populism. However, there is a substantial difference between an extreme right-wing xenophobic party and an experimental progressive party proposing to expand participation and devolution.

⁴² Mudde maintains that contemporary populism (since the 1980s) is mainly characterised by right wing parties prioritising strong leadership rather than participation. However he does not make the difference among different populist parties, generalising the application of the thin ideology to all parties contraposing the people to the elite (Mudde 2004). Santos (2016) maintains that right wing populism is a reaction to the consequences of austerity politics with claims of protecting welfare and rights for those 'entitled' and 'deserving' them. On the contrary, left wing populism emerges from the causes of austerity as an unjust political option to be contrasted with the expansion of welfare and rights.

degenerate and also reinvigorate it promises (Panizza 2005). May it be that populism has been constructed as a negative category because the political movements and parties labelled with this term denounce the intrinsically contradictory but constitutional aspect of liberal democracy as an elitist enterprise? May it be that demagoguery is the shadow of populism?

Mény and Surel contend that it is a general tendency of the political elite to apply a populist logic, especially the political discourse of ‘representatives themselves who, more often than not, talk or act as if democracy were the pure expression of popular will’ (Mény and Surel 2002b:9), while they defend a vision of democracy with a second constitutional pillar. In other words, the concept of people and of democracy stressed by populist parties is the same as that possessed by the ‘representatives’ of other parties, however, these other representatives are also legitimated within the constitutional pillar due to the adherence to a party structure that respects this second pillar.

The two sins of populism are its lack of discursive consideration for state apparatus under constitutionalism (that is, the liberal component of liberal democracy), and its anti-establishment discourse. However, anti-establishment does not imply anti-democratic institutions. This analysis underestimates the role of the elite in this view, as the problem is not that ‘populist movements opposed the institutions or procedures which impeded the direct and full expression of the people’s voice (Mény and Surel 2002b:9), but rather, that it opposes the non-participatory character of those institutions and procedures which allow an elite to hegemonise political power.

1.4.2 *The liberal crisis stimulates its emergence*

Populist movements emerge as a reaction to the crisis of liberalism. Populism here, refers to the movements and parties that centre their political message on appealing to the people and in exposing the limits of the democratic pillar in liberal democratic regimes. Since the liberal pillar of democracy is unable to provide democratic penetration, at least into the social and economic spheres, populists demand an expansion of the democratic pillar within constitutions and institutions. Being either with or without institutional forms, movements of this kind emerge as anti-establishment opposition when the crisis of political liberalism solidifies. That is, the moment when people feel that demands from below are not being met by the political establishment (Laclau 2005a:139). Rancière sustains that under populism, the

political establishment groups together several and heterogeneous forms of dissent, regardless of their political potential and by virtue of a supposed inferiority of the people emerging from the populist equivalence (regardless of its religious, racist or democratic origin). This is as ‘Populism is the convenient name under which is dissimulated the exacerbated contradiction between popular legitimacy and expert legitimacy, that is, the difficulty the government of science has in adapting itself to manifestations of democracy and even to the mixed form of representative systems’ (Rancière 2006:79–80).⁴³

Besides being controversial, populism can abstractly be characterised for being ‘a primal political reaction of the ruled against the rulers’ (Taggart 2000:109). It can be read as a disaffection from liberalism but not from democracy, as while the elite are accused to of being anti-democratic (limited sovereignty), populists are accused of being anti-liberal (anti-elite and anti-minority) because they oppose the elitism of the constitutional pillar of liberal regimes (Krastev 2013).

Taggart maintains that populism is a vague and undefinable empirical phenomena that is not generalizable. An understanding of liberal representative democracy is impossible without an understanding of populism. He provides a general characterisation of populism, affirming that it is hostile to representative politics, it identifies a community and a heartland, it has no core values, it is a reaction to the crisis but contains internal dilemmas and, finally, it is versatile – able to adapt to the environment in which it operates (Taggart 2000:1–9). Pasquino (2005), elaborates on the ideological, social and political conditions that make the emergence of populism possible: populist leaders who identify with people; the idea that the people are better than their rulers; rejection of politics, parties and politicians; demand for the abolishment of political intermediaries; political isolation and alienation by individuals who do not engage with associations and organisations; social malaise; urbanisation; the presence of a populist leadership providing solutions and identity of its enemies; and the existence of a leader able to exploit social conditions. Taggart also maintains that populism refers to ‘the people’ because of the vagueness of this concept which allows populist leaders to refer to a big number of persons – the majority – which share a monolithic solidary and a

⁴³ On commonalities between Rancière and Laclau’s about populism see (Arditi 2010; Bowman 2007).

united view of self-awareness (Taggart 2000:92). Populism is characterised by a charismatic leader who embodies straightforwardness, simplicity and clarity (Taggart 2000:07-103). Taggart concludes his book by maintaining that populism is not good or bad but that it needs to be understood in the context and that this is a paramount in contemporary politics (Quijano 2000:231; Taggart 2000:115–18).

Is it possible to assume that populism is an alarm of liberal democratic institutional excesses? Pasquino responds affirmatively to this question by asserting that populism ‘must be considered an indication that a specific democratic regime does not work or perform satisfactorily’ (Pasquino 2005:31). If so, how justifiable is such an alarm and how should we analyse it in order to dig into the alternative potential of such alarm and to avoid considering it as a mere form of protest by the supporters of populist movements? For Laclau, understanding populism is not merely necessary to understand the political sphere, but it is also necessary because it represents the space in which politics takes place. In this sense, politics is populism:

Since the construction of the “people” is the political act par excellence – as opposed to pure administration within a stable institutional framework – the sine qua non requirements of the political are the constitution of the antagonistic frontiers within the social and the appeal of new subjects of social change – which involves, as we know, the production of empty signifiers in order to unify a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands in equivalential chains (Laclau 2005a:154).

The elitist attempt to demote populism is revealed by Laclau. He does so while investigating the origin of the dichotomy between ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ in mass psychology in the XIX century: ‘Populism has not only been demoted: it has also been denigrated. Its dismissal has been part of the discursive construction of a certain normality, of an ascetic political universe from which its dangerous logics had to be excluded’ (Laclau 2005a:19). Since liberal democratic regimes are centred in elitist and procedural dimensions, the quality of the democratic participation of the people and their wider integration in the political sphere, is seen as a pathology. The denigration and dismissal of populism, to some extents, overlaps with the dismissal of the masses (that is explored in some details below), and to the defence of a structure and institutional crystallisation of the political (Laclau 2005a:63).

1.4.3 *The democratic discourse makes the people*

Rejecting the equation of populism and demagogy (2005a:67), Laclau approaches the subject by exploring the root of such an equation in mass psychology and semiotics in order to explain its political implications (Laclau 2005a chapters 1-3). Weber maintains that for Laclau ‘the term “populism” itself is a signifier without any significant content of its own, a signifier that harbours a void’ (B. Weber 2011:13). The distinction between populism and demagogy is especially necessary due to the negative acceptation obtained by the term in the last four decades. In fact, Laclau underlines that the literature on the subject diverts its attention from the political dimension of populism, as it is trying to identify it as a pathology that can be characterised by a number of elements that can be found in different political experiences, diverse geographical locations and in various historical contexts. By dismissing populism, it has dismissed its democratic potential that is the very place in which the political is defined. For Laclau, since political theorists and politicians are unable to provide a definition of populism, they simply label certain social phenomena as populist because they are characterised by a series of external elements that are void inside. In this way, populism is deprived of intrinsic rationality (Laclau 2005a:16–17).

In order to elaborate ‘On Populist Reasons’ Laclau makes an analysis of the discursive formation which he considers to be not merely related to language but to be also integrated in the relational dimension among people. The discourse represents and reproduces the objectivity of the experience because ‘elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it. Thus “relation” and “objectivity” are synonymous’ (Laclau 2005a:68).

The discursive creation of the ‘people’ takes place in the populist dynamic through the emergence of individual ‘democratic demands’ which represent unsatisfied social claims. It emerges as the dissatisfaction and dichotomy of a part of society from the political establishment. As more democratic demands are grouped together they become ‘popular demands’. This is a heterogeneous but united front of demands, sharing an equivalent contraposition and dissatisfaction to the establishment. This is what Laclau calls the ‘equivalential chain’, which constitutes the structure of a populism as an ‘equivalence’ of popular demands and ‘difference’ between demands and as an opposition to the political

establishment. The impossibility of the chain of equivalence to express all democratic demands is the reason for the hegemonic presence of an empty signifier as the symbolic representation of the entire chain (Laclau 1996:36–46, 2005a:69–71).⁴⁴ The emptiness of the signifier is far from being restricted to what the literature considers part of ‘populist vagueness’. It is precisely the political potential of populism, the ‘empty signifier arises from the need to name an object which is both impossible and necessary’ (Laclau 2005a:71). The empty signifier aggregates democratic demands and forms a popular front to give the political relevance, and although it is unable to identify individual demands, all of them are encompassed in the emptiness of the simplification.

Laclau maintains that the people do not exist as an abstract entity before the experiential formation. It is created in the process in which an excluded part of the whole population, the *plebs*, identifies itself as *populous*, which is the totality of ‘the people’, and differentiates itself from the elite – which is the source of exclusion – and does so through the non-satisfaction of popular demands (Laclau 2005a:94). The populist leader is constitutive of the empty signifier and decisive in establishing the populist identity and symbol, and as such, their role is not accessory but foundational (see also Arditì 2010; Laclau 2005a:99, 160).

The ‘irrationality of populism’ is a false critique because populist signification is built on reason and affect, the reason being that the associations of signifier and signified are regulated by the unconscious (Laclau 2005a:111). The frontier of populism along with its chain of equivalence are blurred. In addition the demands included and excluded in the chain of equivalence are not fixed. For this reason, its language is imprecise and mutable ‘not because of any cognitive failure, but because it tries to operate performatively within a social reality [context] which is to a large extent heterogeneous and fluctuating’ (Laclau 2005a:118). Populism emerges as a protest against a political system and proposes a radical alternative, that is ‘populism presents itself both as subversive of the existing state of things and as the starting point for a more or less radical reconstruction of a new order whenever the previous one has been shaken’ (Laclau 2005a:177). The perspective of reconstruction is democratic.

⁴⁴ When popular demands are partially encompassed by the political establishment, the empty signifier fluctuates across different political frontiers and in this case it is a fluctuating signifier (Laclau 2005a:131–33).

Where the democratic pillar of liberal democracy has succumbed, populism envisages reconstructing it. Laclau's analysis helps to identify several elements constituting the political. The populist logic he proposes has the merit to present a way in which it is possible to think about politics in the emptiness of a strong signification of concepts assumed to be fundamental, such as people and representation.

1.4.4 *Asymmetries and perversions*

A series of critiques have been directed at Laclau's main work on populism. Arditì criticises the gap in which the political potential of populism is inscribed, since it can work as a rupture but not as a reformist potential of an institutionalised system (Arditi 2010).

Žižek has raised some objections among them the fact that Laclau failed to acknowledge the predominance of the class struggle among other subjectivities struggling against capitalism. Žižek contends that the 'proliferation [of political subjectivities], which seems to relegate "class struggle" to a secondary role is the result of the "class struggle" in the context of today's global capitalism' and he does not 'accept that all elements which enter into hegemonic struggle are in principle equal: in the series of struggles (economic, political, feminist, ecological, ethnic, etc.)' (B. Weber 2011; Žižek 2000:320, see also 2008:264–333).

Laclau instead contends that capitalism is socially constructed in discourse through various subjectivities where class co-initiates with new social subjectivities that are defined in the very process of populist identity formation that is explained above. Laclau argues that 'the anti-globalization movement has to operate in an entirely new way: it must advocate the creation of equivalential links between deeply heterogeneous social demands while, at the same time, elaborating a common language' (Laclau 2005a:231). The principle of 'intercultural translation' and 'ecologies of knowledges' support the identification of equivalential links departing from a diatopical hermeneutics, that is preserving the social identities and context of the different subjectivities. The notion of 'knowledge born in struggle' and the epistemologies of the South provide viable instruments to work towards a common language and produce a collective discourse (Santos 2004 we will come back to these argument below, 2006c, 2014).

Waisanen (2012) contends that Laclau’s theory does not elaborate on the perversion of the discourse internal to populist movements that may lead to anti-democratic developments. Also problematic, is Laclau’s original appreciation between individual demands that come to form the chain of equivalence of the populist identity, something which Laclau calls ‘democratic demand’. He maintains that they are democratic when they are proposed by underdogs to the political system and because they are egalitarian and presuppose exclusion or deprivation (Laclau 2005a:125–28, see also 2005b:37–43). For example, let’s consider the case of racism connected to immigration, something that is becoming an increasingly common discourse in Europe. A racist claim against immigrants can be egalitarian within a certain conception of community and can be motivated to contrast and limit the influence of immigrants in the community’s ‘traditional’ living space and work places. The demand of the community to the political system would be a defence of the community against the immigrants. In this case, Laclau would object to the idea that the immigrants are the underdog and not the community, and that the principle of equality must include both the community and the immigrants.⁴⁵ For this reason then, the demand is not democratic, however it concurs with the creation of the populist identity. In fact, Laclau affirms that a ‘[f]ascist regime can absorb and articulate democratic demands as much as a liberal one’ (Laclau 2005a:125).⁴⁶

How does one consider a chain of equivalence in which democratic and undemocratic demands co-exist? How does one measure the populist democratic potential emerging from this mixed domain? Laclau is less optimistic than Rancière on the democratic outcome of populism (Laclau 2005a:176–77, 246–47), as it is a structural part of the discursive formation of populist identities. He states that populism may not lead to democratic outcomes because the individual demands that come to constitute the populist chain of equivalence may be both democratic and undemocratic. Through the epistemologies of the South, Santos provides an

⁴⁵ Badiou maintains that “‘democracy’ is what regulates politics in respect of communitarian predicates, or predicates of subsets. Democracy is what maintains politics in the realm of universality proper to its destination. It is what guarantees that all nominations in terms of racial or sexual characteristics, or in terms of hierarchy and social status, or statements formulated in terms of problems such as “there is an immigrant problem”, will be statements that undo the conjunction of politics and democracy’ (Badiou 2005:94).

⁴⁶ Populism as fascism does not relate only to the historical forms of fascism of the XX century. Amongst the six forms of social fascism, ‘populist fascism’ implies for Santos the definition of socio-political passivity as the legitimate form of democratic participation. Populist fascism takes place in capitalist societies through the creation of an immediate identity with consumeristic life styles which are unachievable for the majority of the people (Santos 1998b:25–26).

answer targeting the three major forms of social exclusion, that is colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy, and therefore the 'democratic demands' need not to support either of these forms of exclusions in order to be considered democratic. In other words, populism is the terrain of the political. To be the terrain of democracy it must count on the democratic value of its original individual demands and on the resulting democratic value of the chain of equivalence of its populist demands.

The possible disaggregation of populism and democracy (Panizza 2005) is further intensified by the electoral process, when the empty signifier of a populist movement gains passive participation (see also Erfani 2007) in the banalisation of voting. The possibility to express a mere choice among party options but not political options in details (Santos 1998c) in elections, implies that the possible democratic value of the people emerging in that chain of equivalence is lost. The populist identity that is channelled into electoral politics does not represent democratic demands but mere emptiness.

According to the argument sustained above, in the process of the creation of popular identities that takes place within populism, we have an answer to the incompleteness and inconsistency of the people and its representation. This is an answer that cannot be structured and crystallised in a pure democratic institutional form without hibernating the continuous emergence of individual democratic demands. In other words, populism pushes the discourse of popular participation to the extreme, and this is among the reasons why it has largely been undermined in modern and contemporary politics (that is based on 'the form' rather than on 'the substance').

1.4.5 *Populism opens a breach?*

Participatory populism combines participation and representation in a political dynamic that may open a 'loophole' in the elitist self-reproduction circle and may bring about marginal or substantial changes in the regime, namely the increase of forms of political participation and the advance of social equality. With the features of participatory populism, I do not intend to defend that demagogy should be considered as a perspective, but I do suggest to divide political experiences labelled as populist between those that make prominent reference to the people as ethnos (generally identified with the right wing,

especially in Europe – as seen above),⁴⁷ and those who focus on the rehabilitation of social engagement in the democratic process through popular participation.⁴⁸

If we are able to overcome the study of populism as a mere instrument adopted by oppositional political leaderships in order to demagogically subjugate populations and search for deeper political meanings, we may find insightful evidence. Indeed, ‘populism is the only legitimate form of democratic politics’ (Chatterjee 2011:15)⁴⁹ for what Chatterjee considers the fore-most strata of Indian society, what he names ‘political society’. For instance, this is the wide group of urban squatter settlers and informal workers in India, corresponding to the group of documented and undocumented immigrants in the West (Chatterjee 2004, 2011:24). Chatterjee argues that these social groups create informal associations to struggle and to defend their moral rights, rather than their legal or political rights. They do not dispute the law that they infringe upon with their settlement and work (i.e., property rights or trade regulations), but they demand that the ‘authorities make a political judgment to use the sovereign power of the State to declare their case an exception to the norm laid down by law’ (Chatterjee 2011:16).

Chatterjee’s political society has a role in the urban economy, as it offers cheap services to the middle class. Its forceful removal would imply a high political cost for the elite. By negotiating through political mobilisation and allying with other political groups, political society demands the exception to the norm and co-opts the demagogic populist dynamic. Chatterjee maintains that the people define their demands and the politicians incorporate

⁴⁷ The ethnos is a nationalist concept of people, ‘When they define the people as an ethnos, rather than the more abstract demos, populist movements are placing themselves on a slippery slope’ (Mény and Surel 2002a:7).

⁴⁸ I do not defend that participatory populism is exempt from demagoguery but I reject the equation of populism with demagoguery *tout court*. When mobilised as a negative ideological tool, populism is used to delegitimise emerging political experience as opposed to the good and healthy politics of traditional parties. This approach undermines the understanding of social, psychological, communicative transformation of politics which interest the daily life of many citizens (Mancini 2015:13–14 and 75ss).

⁴⁹ Populism is a term used bottom-up to potentiate the political struggle of local populations (Mendes 2004a) as well as a pejorative definition adopted top-down by the political elite to diminish the political identity of the struggle (Mendes 2005). Chatterjee assumes the contribution of Laclau (2005b) in order to propose to consider that democracy is populism in the sense that is an aggregation of heterogeneous democratic demands emerging from the bottom up. The fact that populism is based on an empty signifier, or a hegemonic force, implies that democracy is not achieved in the ideal of a-political equality. But this is not due to the impossibility of democracy but to the lack of homogeneity in the human experience from which derives a variety of democratic (and undemocratic) demands. They are combined in the political through the creation of populist demands.

them into their political promises in order to obtain political support. The role of the populist leader, the empty signifier and the demagogic discourse (and its use) are created from the bottom up, on the basis of fundamental moral needs to subsistence and livelihood. Political-colonialism remains intact because the political regime is not disputed. In it, however, emerges a bottom-up democratic dynamic force and the coloniser accommodates the colonised in extraordinary terms in relation to the liberal pillar, thus expanding the social democratic perspective. Here, populism seems have a strategy in which it can force the political establishment without questioning its status. It does not aim at changing the law but at protecting the precarious conditions of subsistence that law permits. This is as, according to Chatterjee 'the instrumental use of the vote is possible only within a field of strategic politics. This is the stuff of democratic politics as it takes place on the ground in India. It involves what appears to be a constantly shifting compromise between the normative values of modernity and the moral assertion of popular demands' (Chatterjee 2004:41, see also 2013).

On these grounds, the demagogic side of populism reverts into an utterly moral one. It is democratic but not liberal because it defends the basic claim to survival and livelihood of the worst off as it neglects the property rights and business regulations inscribed in the law and constitution. However, the democratic burst of this kind of populism does not intend to shift the liberal pillar, but simply tries to create an exception to it. This is as a consequence the political-colonial *status quo* is unquestioned, although a breach is open in its moral substance. To foresee a substantial shift, the state will need to give normative, institutional recognition to a political society that is going towards an ecological concept of democracy. For Chatterjee the problem stands in the scheme of norm/universal vs. deviation/exception, which characterises Western political normativity. He asks if it is possible to think beyond this paradigm. This question that Chatterjee eventually asks resounds in the core assumption of an epistemological demand, the moral or meta-right be normatively defined according to respect for both, equality and diversity, reinvigorating the quest for epistemological equality and recognition of difference: '[w]e have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us' (Santos 2001:193).

Understood as oppositional politics, populism is a political instrument used by the political-colonial discourse to decharacterize social struggles. It conforms with the colonial practice adopted in the global South to diminish colonised peoples and cultures as inferior, as in this case political forms are disqualified as ‘popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, or indigenous knowledge’ (Santos 2007a:46) or are deemed useless. Mastropaolo (2005:52–53) maintains that the literature on populism in the second half of the XX century classified the political regimes of countries of the global South to diminish their democratic character. In the mainstream elitist view, ‘politics is reduced to an inter and intra-institution game and to the rational application of measures outlined by the elites’ (*ibidem*). Populism is a discriminatory label adopted to ‘standardise and integrate in a negative form, protest actions or the dynamics of a more participatory citizenship or of mere presence in public space’ (Mendes 2005:173). Populism is the label used to describe as inferior, ignorant, un-skilled, unprofessional, and useless a political position that appeals to the people as opposed to the political elite.⁵⁰

It is appropriate to make an analysis from the perspective of the epistemologies of the South to advance a non-populist (but popular) approach of populism and to propose alternatives to the detriment of liberal representative regimes following the political crisis (Santos 2015a).⁵¹ Collovald (2005) demonstrates how the use of the term also refers to the participatory exercise developed by ‘the people’ to overturn the elitist representatives where the democratic demands of the people are neglected by the establishment. In its original meaning “the appeal to the people” was both the practice of mobilisation of disadvantaged groups by the existing system of social and political domination and an enterprise (which can be retrospectively judged wrong, failed or illusory – doesn’t matter here) intended to give a political voice to those who had none’ (Collovald 2004:91, 2005:159). Political society makes a bottom-up use of this kind of populism. The question then is, is it possible to think of a similar

⁵⁰ The use of the term is often mobilised as an accusation of false politics, ‘[w]hile it claims to be an analytical category, “populism” is however also a political insult’ (Collovald 2005:155), Mendes and Collovald insist on how it is propagated by the political and media elite alike.

⁵¹ The position of Boaventura de Sousa Santos is not apologetic of a specific form of populism; however, the recent Master class cited here (Santos 2015a) presents an argument that echoes the position of this paragraph in reading the populist experience in a non-monolithic sense and opens the possibility of interpreting Santos’ position in the form here proposed.

dynamic when the populist demand emerges from the top, which is from a party or political movement? I will engage with these questions in this and next sections.

The acceptance of populism depends on the meaning assigned to the concept of 'people' (Biorcio, 2015, p. 13). The people of demagogic populism is the ignorant, diminished, unemployed, unable and therefore easy to manipulate. This acceptance characterises, pre-eminently, the submission of the people, the manipulation by the leader and potentially, the adoption of an authoritarian regime (Urbinati, 1998; Akkerman, 2003; Abts and Rummens, 2007). After this declination, political elitism is reinvigorated, but not tackled. Moreover, the 'people' is stigmatised because its own ignorance allows the emergence and success of populist parties (Collovald, 2005). The people of participatory populism are subaltern to the political establishment and are hindered in their claim for the redistribution of power. For this reason, the appeal to the 'people' is a democratic demand of participation of the demos (not ethnos – the exclusionary people) in democracy. Fusing populism into one term implies subsuming the subaltern with the diminished concept of the people (that has been intentionally diminished by the elite), and rendering it unable to provide political views and to self-govern itself.

Only recently, has the concept of populism assumed this detractive meaning. It has experienced a transformation in the 1990s when from '[c]onceptual tool, populism has turned into ideological weapon' (Taguieff 1998:6). The demagogic use of populism is an instrument of manipulation for forces of the extreme right (i.e. the *Front National* in France or the *Lega Nord* in Italy)⁵² and an instrument for the de-legitimation of experiences of popular participation by emerging political forces, including progressive ones. In both cases, demagogic populism is adopted in defence of an elitist vision of democracy where an elite (new or old) defends the political as a space where not all the democratic demands emerging from bottom up can be accepted and incorporated. Demagogic populism is the opposite of participatory populism that is inscribed in Chatterjee's understanding and in the original acceptance of the term, where the appeal to the people aims at giving value to its sovereign

⁵² Extreme right populism is characterised by a central leader seeking a direct connection with the people – which is seen as a homogeneous and undifferentiated unit – against the political elite and foreigners. It is traced by racism and xenophobia for the defence of a mystified concept of people, as unique and unchangeable (Taguieff 1998).

power and for the inclusion of a plurality of its demands in the political sphere. Demagogic populism excludes the possibility of a wide and direct participation of the people in the political sphere and defends the unavoidable necessity of the political representatives.

Referring to Laclau, Santos (2016) maintains that the emptiness of the signifier is a political consequence and not a *status quo* to be hurdled. It follows the void of key categories such as democracy, freedom, civil society, (equality or social) contract and so on, and in that light, populism is a consequence of the loss of meaning of political categories. To this extent, populism encompasses political values emerging from the crisis of political liberalism and, therefore, a non-demagogic analysis of populism implies responses that are encompassed in the potential of what I call ‘participatory populism’. This acceptance of populism includes the analysis of the political discourse and practice addressing: democratisation of democracy, increased adoption of participatory structures in political parties, revitalisation of representatives through participatory democracy, loss of the monopoly of political organisation by political parties (political ecological thinking leading to ‘demodiversity’), increase of the role of social organisation and movements, popular councils support social politics, and re-foundation of the state (Santos 2015a). This last point is central from the post-colonial perspective, as the modern state: expands the political within the public sphere, divides the public from the private, and neutralises the democratic relevance of the non-public sphere – thus limiting the democratisation of democracy of other life spheres.

1.4.6 Party-movements and populism

With an apparent ‘lightweight’ analysis, Mény and Surel contend that ‘all populist movements speak and behave as if democracy meant the power of the people and only the power of the people’ (Mény and Surel 2002b:9). With this allegation, the two French scholars contend that populist movements neglect the constitutional pillar of liberal democracy, that is, the ‘institutional system’. They also underestimate those movements that consider that the power of the people should enter into the constitutional system and should convert it from an elitist enterprise into a democratic (or at least more democratic) system through participation. Only a few pages later in their writing, however, the two authors highlight that indeed this is a virtue of populist movements, and that ‘populism constitutes the most acute tension between the power of elites and the role of the masses [...] It does not fully accept

the usual instruments of representative democracy, but neither does it adopt strictly unconventional forms of political participation' (Mény and Surel 2002b:17). This inversion demonstrates that the literature on populism, being unable to provide specific arguments for different political phenomena, tends to assign a pre-formulated label to all non-traditional parties or movements, something which Mény and Surel were aware of but could not avoid, and thereby adopted a demagogic use of populism as is the tendency. The whole volume they edited (Mény and Surel 2002a) tends to shed light on this aspect, that is, to understand populism as a democratic component that can serve the theorisation of democracy as far as it is not capitalised on to undermine the political venture of emerging movements. How can we avoid falling into the trap of labelling emerging political movements and trying to identify within their political experience a list of characteristics that are typical of the circulating taxonomy of populism instead of analysing and understanding their potential? The answer is to study them case by case, as Beiz (2002) and Kitschelt (2002) highlight with reference to right wing parties labelled as populist.

The features that characterise populist phenomena are numerous and controversial. Different scholars make different lists and there is no final consensus because the label is adopted for a range of contradictory phenomena. Paul Taggart (2004) makes a list of four features that qualify populist parties and movements. They include: hostility to representative politics, identification with heartland (to characterise 'the people'), lack of core value and, reaction to a sense of extreme crisis.⁵³

Other characteristics that are widespread in the literature on populism include: charismatic leader, anti-elite discourse, immediateness of democracy, and discursive demagogy (simplification and generalisation). These characteristics tend to define populism in its demagogic acceptation. So-called populist movements and parties may have part or all of the characteristics of demagogic populism, while, at the same time, strive for forms of democratic innovation based on participation rooted at the local level and fighting against the corruption of public servants. They create a new enthusiasm for democracy that stands in

⁵³ Daiwiks (2009) identifies two basic characteristics such as of the focus of the leaders on 'the people' and its opposition to the elite or another group.

contrast with the current political crisis, something that is fundamental and which Canovan (1999) underlines very well.

Evaluating the possibility of achieving a more participatory democratic system, Macpherson faced ‘the vicious circle: we cannot achieve more democratic participation without a prior change in social inequality and in consciousness, but we cannot achieve the changes in social inequality and consciousness without a prior increase in democratic participation’ (Macpherson 1989:100). Party-movements seem to provide a discursive response to this impasse working on the societal as well as the institutional level. Their populism may serve to fortify the way out of the paradox if it brings democratic progression towards the institutionalisation of participation to de-institutionalise equality. For example, entering into the institutional complex through means of procedural elitism (i.e., winning elections) in order to subvert it from within by expanding the participatory potential of the system. Moreover, party-movements can trigger the public political education that is needed against the ‘epistemic weaknesses. This concept, identified by Bilgrami in liberal political theory, is the condition of epistemic inferiority in which the people live in a ‘longstanding political and economic culture that erects the border in their mentality, is in all the sites they are exposed to (their homes and upbringing, the media and educational institutions, etc.)’ (Bilgrami 2009:57). Bilgrami further confirms the idea that party-movements can tackle this inferiority, as he states ‘popular movements are a necessary [and non-sufficient] site and condition for such public education that will remove cognitive deficits and remove the mental and frames-configuring boundary I have identified’ (Bilgrami 2009:57).

To understand the populist use of demagoguery we need to assess populism in a non-populist way (Santos 2015a).⁵⁴ Demagoguery which is done by populist movements is not undone with demagoguery by traditional parties or elitist discourses about populist demagogues. Populist rhetoric tries to convert the negative acceptation of the term by openly adopting it and using it as a: basic connotation of closeness to the people, nationalism understood as horizontality among all citizens (as opposed to elitist verticality) and direct democracy (unmediated by the

⁵⁴ I include in the demagoguery of anti-populism demagoguery what Santos calls ‘populist fascism’ (Santos 1998b:25, 2005a:24), which is the capitalist unequal exchange of democratic demands with ephemeral consumerism typical in capitalism.

political elite). The assumption of populism is that it is a term implying closeness to the people (the mainstream acceptation) that is synonymous of demagoguery. However, observing politics through the lens of demagoguery (as opposed to populism as participation of the people), we can see how mainstream political parties are demagogic in subtler forms but equal to populist movements. This evidence undermines the strength of demagogic criticisms of party-movements because demagoguery is a characteristic of liberal representative democracy and not an exclusive prerogative of populism. Therefore, there are two main reasons that disqualify an elitist view of populism (understood merely as demagoguery). First, populism is widely recognised as a bottom-up insurgency of the citizens against their representatives and as an alarm for the malfunctioning of democracy, as was elaborated on above (Laclau 2005a:139; Pasquino 2005:31; see also Taggart 2000:109). Second, the appeal to the people is not a prerogative of just populist parties, as it pertains to all party families (Mastropaolo 2005:59–60). Assuming ‘politicians’ populism’ (Canovan 1981) as being a synonymous of demagoguery of a political leader to win electoral consensus and support, then all politicians resort to populism to some extent (see also Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Taggart 2000:107). Mair argues that a version of populism (such as the one adopted by the labour party in the UK) is not a threat to constitutional democracy, but that it ‘may actually serve leaders’ interests by offering a means of legitimating government within a context of widespread depoliticisation’ (Mair 2002:90). Therefore, while party-movements encompass populist features, it is political myopia to discharge their political discourse, innovation and effective presence on the mere base of this very wide and embracing label.

1.5 Abyssal origins and facticity of political-colonialism

A regime is politically colonial when it allows radical exclusions followed by systematic oppression. The theoretical presupposition of this regime is abyssal thinking, as elaborated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007a, 2007b). This thinking is going to be a reference of the analysis of this section.⁵⁵ Beyond the connivance and cooperation they have

⁵⁵ In the literature, the term political-colonialism is used as a synonym of neo-colonial rule, referring to the external exercise of political power in national political regimes (Eriksen 2000:81; Smith 2004:61). Closer to the definition used in this text is the one provided by the former Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India, P. K. Chatterjee (2007) who describes how the India of independence has left the Gandhian path to undertake an elitist one. The main point is that the presence of a strong or weak foreign interest in domestic

had with historical colonialism, liberal democratic regimes continue to provide the conditions needed for radical exclusion at three analytical levels: philosophical, social and political. The four chapter sub-sections below explore these three levels after first recalling the historical roots that link modern politics with colonialism. Before engaging with this analysis, I provide a working definition here. The entry ‘colonialism’ in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* starts with the following definition: ‘Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another’ (Kohn 2014). ‘Politics’ has four different acceptations, as outlined in the *Dictionary of Philosophy* by Abbagnano: ‘the doctrine of law and moral, the theory of the State, the art and science of government and, finally, the study of intersubjective behaviours’ (Abbagnano 2001:829). Rancière provides a subjectivity to complement the definition of politics as ‘a mode of acting put into practice by a specific kind of subject and deriving from a particular form of reason [...] it involves a distinctive kind of subject considered, and it involves this subject in the form of a mode of relation that is its own’ (Rancière 2001). A definition of political-colonialism may read as follows: *Political-colonialism is a rationality that defines the relation between two subjectivities holding different concepts of the people,⁵⁶ where one dominates the other through law, state form and the art and science of government.* The ‘people’ is the founding category of democracy, when dominated by the other founding category, ‘power’, in the political intersubjective relation, political-colonialism is in place.⁵⁷

political affairs does not represent the main characteristic of democratic colonialism without the presence of an elite that subdues society.

⁵⁶ The ‘people’ provides forms of understanding the common good that politics shall implement. Colonialism is based on an idea of structural inferiority of the colonised. In liberal representative regimes, the idea that the people is incapable (politically ignorant), or unable (for the size of the polity), to govern itself, is implemented through the constitutional pillar which formalises how the people is governed by the political establishment. The constitutional pillar also protects individual liberties, but liberty of self-regulation and self-government by the people is residual which undermines the implementation of the democratic pillar. For Chantal Mouffe this is the democratic paradox, ‘What cannot be contestable in a liberal democracy is the idea that it is legitimate to establish limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty. Hence its paradoxical nature’ (Mouffe 2000:4). Mouffe maintains that the tension between liberty and equality cannot be reconciled and the best form to deal with the paradox is to foster an agonistic concept of democracy where opposing ideals are presented as adversaries as opposed to enemies. She does not substantiate the political inferiority of equality with respect to liberty.

⁵⁷ After questioning the validity of meta-concepts such as ‘people’ and ‘representation’ above, we understand the ontological indefiniteness of any political model, including liberal representative democracy, which bases its definition on crystallised declinations of those meta-concepts. Exploring the opposite and patronised concepts of elitism and populism, we appreciate how ‘shared power relations’ emerge from the unpredictable evolution polarised by exclusion-dissatisfaction and plurality-equivalence among the excluded.

1.5.1 Historical – from colonial empires to political-colonialism

Chatterjee highlights that ‘modern political theory of the normative kind uses a definite strategy of historicization in order to demarcate and serially redefine its own discursive space’ (Chatterjee 2011:2). However, a technique that declares political concepts obsolete and retrograde (and therefore unacceptable) is unfit at the normative political level. With no aim to revitalise past knowledge and practice, it is nonetheless important to understand the relationship between colonialism and liberal representative democracy. We depart from the basic evidence that they are not alternative, but rather, are strictly linked and this relationship has historical roots. As explored above, the historical root of such a link traces back to the XVIII century and its development is still ongoing. Between colonialism and liberal democracy, there is not a mere contemporaneity but a simultaneity and a cooperation as well because the same political elites were engaged in defining the liberal democratic regime as well as the expanding European empires.⁵⁸

Conklin (1998) investigates the link between the liberal democratic values of imperial countries (focusing on France’s 3rd republic, 1870-1940). Besides asserting the paradox of their colonial enterprises and the evident ideological contradiction being analysed from our perspective, the humanist spirit of republican France served as a justification for the civilising mission. Instead of providing an apologetic thesis, this argument alerts one to the versatility of the liberal democratic discourse. If French colonial administrators were convinced republicans and humanists, far from justifying the colonial empire with the banner of the

Opposite to political colonialism stands the concept of political-democratisation understood as an unfinishable process of translating intersubjective relations of domination into relations of political equality, with a focus for the inclusion of those subjectivities historically oppressed and marginalised. As it will be very evident along the present and next chapter, this definition of political-democratisation is substantiated by the epistemologies of the South that find a master theorist-activist in Mahatma Gandhi.

⁵⁸ Liberal democracy developed within the same modern rationality of historical colonialism. The elitist approach was the background of the definition of the emerging political regime as, for instance, in the USA where most of the ‘founding fathers’ were landowners and slaveholders (Nylen 2003:3). The common origin of colonialism and liberal regimes justifies the claim that the same rationality structured both, however, it does not imply that the evolution has been also parallel. On the one hand historical colonialism is now historicised and accepted as being morally wrong, while, on the other hand democracy as an idea has grown of moral significance. The political fact remains that the gap between morals and politics continues to leave a hegemonic space of political-colonialism internal to the polity (besides among countries). Therefore, undermining the moral progress and the political tendency is morally worsening under neoliberal pressure.

mission civilisatrice,⁵⁹ it shows to what extreme the liberal democratic discourse and political practice can distance itself from the ideal of democracy and can encompass racist, colonialist and oppressive measures. A contemporary understanding of liberalism alone (i.e., liberal pillar in liberal democratic representative regimes) is theoretically sufficient to consider a colonial regime morally indefensible. This however, is merely a moral claim while at the political level it was not sufficient. Manent maintains that the French ‘imperial republic, far from being the unhappy outcome of a sad reality contrary to our values, furnishes the classic type of our political form and our political regime and, I would say, the effectual truth of the liberal order’ (Manent 2014:139). The antidote to political-colonialism is democratisation with the strong meaning of horizontal power relations. The liberal pillar alone simply does not include the equality necessary for that purpose. This is a process that has to do with the global North as well as with the global South because the nature of political-colonial relations is inbuilt in Western modernity as Santos highlights:

the constitutive nature of colonialism in western modernity underscores its importance for understanding not only the nonwestern societies that were victimized by colonialism, but also the western societies themselves, especially as regards the patterns of social discrimination that prevail inside them (Santos 2010b:228).

We need to distinguish not only the idea from the practice but also which idea of democracy is in place. While Western liberal representative regimes engaged in colonial empires, liberal democracy has been implemented as just a set of declinations of ideas of democracy applied to a large constituency.

Political-colonialism emerged during historical colonialism, but was not terminated with decolonisation.⁶⁰ When historical colonial domination ended, political-colonialism

⁵⁹ Universalism and exceptionalism have been mutually reinforcing in colonial empires with the need of normalisation, that is to bring democracy, rule of law and human rights to those people and countries considered culturally unfit or not ready for them (Chatterjee 2011:8–11).

⁶⁰ Historical decolonisation is not accomplished as far as people are under foreign rule, as in the cases of Tibet, West Sahara and Palestine. Today, Israel is one of the most striking examples of a liberal democratic regime founded on a clear demarcation of a uniform people abysmally distinct from all others, especially the Palestinians (Gordon 2010), a democratic regime which is undemocratic, racist, colonial and exclusionary. Yiftachel, calls it ‘ethnocracy’, highlighting how social and political segregation start from the identification of the people with the *ethnos* rather than with the *demos* (Yiftachel 1999, 2000). Yiftachel acknowledges that the term had been used before him but it had not been theoretically developed into a model or a concept (Yiftachel 1999:386 footnote 15). The constitutive characteristic of Israel’s democracy is its radical exclusion of Palestinians both from the liberal constitutional (even when they are partially represented but ousted as enemies (Zahalka and Gostoli 2016)) and from the democratic social spheres of the social and economic life. Having Jews and

became more sophisticated (Santos et al. 2008:XXXIII–XLI). The democratic aspect is that this form of colonialism has been intensified in all liberal representative regimes – although to different degrees – including both the former colonies and colonising countries. Former colonies have interiorised Western political thought and naturalised it and the coloniser itself has reshaped its social psychology structuring after the colonial order, as the psychology of colonialism is the *intimate enemy* of both the coloniser and the colonised (Nandy 1983). Former colonies see the permanence of what Quijano defines ‘coloniality of power’,⁶¹ while historical colonialism, besides country-related differences, includes epistemological, political, cultural, social, economic and religious oppression. The coloniality of power is established during historical colonialism, resists decolonisation and is based on racial discrimination, the subsequent division of labour and cultural imperialism (Quijano 2000, 2007).

The globalisation of Western values during colonial enterprises set out the norms of modernity and the progress that liberal democracy kept struggling for.⁶² When a country becomes free from the colonial relationship it remains subjugated to its racialisation and epistemological premises, which liberal democracy maintains as universal and valid. It becomes therefore urgent to re-analyse democracy through the lens of an epistemic democracy and democratisation, as is done below with the support of the epistemologies of the South (see for instance Santos 2006c, 2011, 2012, 2014).

Palestinian equally subjects of the same polity would make current Israeli institutions representative of the ethnic division. Israel is an example of an extreme form of a political-colonial regime that functions under a liberal-representative shell, however, it is also an example of a historically colonial and contemporary country. Gordon maintains that Israel ‘is considered a democracy only because one third of the people residing within the borders it controls are not regarded as part of “the people.” So even if one adopts a foreshortened historical perspective, one that begins in 1967, it is fairly obvious that the so-called “only democracy in the Middle East” is simultaneously a colonizing state’ (Gordon 2010).

⁶¹ Besides historical evidence, political-colonialism has theoretical roots that are reinforced by the coloniality of power. Western rationality instilled an organicist concept of society as a unitary body in which the ruling class represents the mind (Quijano 2007). It follows the production of a homogeneous people (although differentiated in its parts which are organised hierarchically) under the control of the ruling elite. This is the elitist concept of people and is a top-down definition based on the very hierarchical logic that it tends to justify. As most of the colonial empires came to an official end, the coloniality of power assumed diversified forms in different countries, maintaining most of its historical colonial elements in ex-colonies and assuming more ‘democratic’ semblance in ex-colonising states. Throughout liberal representative democratic regimes, regardless of their historical past, there is this minimum political-colonial element.

⁶² Concerning the link of colonialism and globalisation and a reading of globalisation as westernisation see (Gianolla 2010).

Political-colonialism is a metaphor used to describe a political regime that telescopes social complexity within an unavoidable system of government that is centred on a representative body of people entitled to take political decisions for the whole society. In political-colonialism, the paradigm of social discrimination is unaffected by the political regime. What is at stake is the rationality of a concept of people that gives form to a state, in which the procedure of organisation precedes and subverts the substantive dimension of horizontality, providing a social hierarchy that is substantially unchangeable.

González Casanova (1965, 2006), defines 'internal colonialism' as the system of dominance that inherited colonial forms within the national context. The domestic polity is thereby characterised by the colonial structure that implies a colonising elite and colonised societies. Racial discrimination – central in former colonies – is sophisticated within former colonising countries, taking the shape of the migrant and even refugee. Racism structures the monoculture of classification (Santos 2006c:16–17) typical of abyssal thinking, as race and political citizenship become *de facto* synonymous. Both internal colonialism and coloniality of power then co-exist with formal liberal democracies, not only in ex-colonies, but also in ex-colonialist states such as Italy with the North-South divide (González Casanova 2006:421). Globalisation and global capitalism have intensified the relevance of political-colonialism by polarising the dichotomy between coloniser (elite) and colonised (wider society) through the combination of national and international elitist interests. González Casanova recognises that a 'new international, internal and transnational colonialism' is at stake:

The strength of the centres of power of world capitalism is also based on the articulation and combination of its own forces from the military-business and scientific complex, through their financial, technological and commercial networks, to the organization of business complexes of the so called transnational and multinational corporations that control from their own banks, through their means of advertising to their markets for services, goods, territories and "conscience". For the maximization of the domain and profit, articulation of business military and political military is fundamental. They all work as a self-regulating, adaptive and complex system, which tends to dominate the world-system without dominating the immense contradictions that the system generates. Within their policies fit the different types of organized colonialism that combine, complement and articulate with associated projects for maximization of profits and the power of corporations and states that support them (González Casanova 2006:426).

The policies in which 'organised colonialism' fits, are in compliance with a network of power that does not emerge from the bottom up, but rather is alien to the affected 'peoples'. Liberal democratic regimes allow this network of power to function, hidden behind the

election as the moment in which political legitimacy is given to a body of representatives whose policies are disconnected from the peoples affected.⁶³ Political-colonialism is subtle, the regular business is dealt with general social indifference but its domination clearly emerges at times of greater social uncertainty, for instance when mega projects are carried on by the state against the will of local population,⁶⁴ or when social reforms and economic instability force political measures to reduce social welfare.

Nylen (2003)(2003) agrees with Bobbio (1987) that democracy is a dynamic and transformative system, and he adds that it involves a 'conflictual process of inclusionary adaptation' but he maintains that the democratic process is stagnating under the distortion of elitist interest and, instead of including, it excludes, this is what Nylen defines as 'Elitist Democracy' (Nylen 2003:4).

The exclusion of political-colonialism is reinforced with the predominance of the state structure over the other five social structures identified by Santos within capitalist societies. Each social structure produces a form of power, law and epistemology in its own relative space: home-place, production, market, community, citizenship and world-space (Santos 2002b:353–416, 2003a:297–374). The six social structures are all autonomous but they contingently overlap forming structural 'constellations' in which social actions take place. Santos underlines that the development of capitalist modernity granted a hegemonic role to the citizenship social structure, which takes the form of state politics, state law and modern science. However, the characteristic of the constellation is never merely centred on the state structure alone but involves the other five social structures (home-place, production, market, community, and world-space). Within a political-colonial regime, the public sphere coincides with the space of citizenship, regulated by the state, and relegates the other five structures to

⁶³ For Bobbio the oligarchic rule through the representation of vested interest is a 'form of alternative democracy' within capitalist society. He maintains its validity arguing that this form of democracy does not dispute democracy but only the traditional idea of sovereignty based on the superiority of the state over particular interests (Bobbio 1987:19). This is too reductive and misleading, political-colonialism implies the missing connection between representation and accountability (Santos and Avritzer 2005) and the missed definition of the 'people' as holder of such sovereignty.

⁶⁴ In Africa the lack of electoral support may imply the stigma of oppression as Wiredu underlines: 'In some parts of Africa, democratically elected governments are known to make note of areas that failed to vote for them so as to pass over them when the time comes for the apportionment of development projects' (Wiredu 2007:169).

the private – or politically irrelevant – sphere.⁶⁵ In this way the state structure dominates the remaining five social structures which are ‘ignored, concealed or suppressed’ (Santos 2003a:373). This means that, putting aside the law and science, the political-colonial power of the state dominates the political power of the home-place, production, market, community and world space.⁶⁶ As a result, the political-colonial domination by the liberal democratic regime is the common sense of Western capitalist societies, as it is nominally restricted to the citizenship social structure but this structure hides all other social structures. The state’s power, or the power of the political regime controls all social structures. Political-colonialism exploits the indolent rationality (Santos 2003a:44) of the colonised society which stops to think of alternatives and is resigned to the political fatalism of the liberal democratic canon – the intimate enemy (Nandy 1983) –, and therefore ‘culture, specifically Western political culture is today as indispensable as inadequate to understand and change the world’ (Santos 2010b:227).

The political-colonial regime is also evident to the theorist that supposes the intrinsic validity of liberal representative democracy. Bobbio writes:

There is no doubt that the continued existence of oligarchies or of elites in power is incompatible with democratic ideals. The fact remains that there is still a substantial

⁶⁵ Bobbio maintains that ‘political democracy’ or the application of democratic principles only to the state and citizen social structure is one of the failures of liberal-democratic regimes. He says: ‘I have considered as 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. Strictly speaking, a democratic society should be democratic - that is, should have these rules [1] all participate in the decision directly or indirectly; 2) the decision is taken after a free discussion by a majority] - in most of the centres of power. In the majority of democracies [democratic regimes], this has not happened’ (Bobbio 1985).

⁶⁶ Santos (2003a:359) underlines that the form of power emerging from the citizenship social structure is less despotic and more regulated than the other five social structures. This point does not negate the prevalence of this form of power over the other five and therefore does not invalidate the argument proposed here. On the contrary, it allows us to underline an important aspect: the main characteristic of political-colonialism is the domination of the political imaginary not the despotism of its methods. Political-colonialism operates with all fine political arts characterised by rhetoric and bureaucracy that are generally predominant over violence. Criticising Kant’s notion of cosmopolitan right and advocating Derrida’s ethical analysis of otherness, Marci demonstrates how liberal-democratic regimes base the relation with the otherness in the juridical norm having humanity as abstract universal category as oppose to the universal nature of human beings. This creates dependency of the ethical norm of ‘hospitality’ on the juridical and political order as oppose to ethical standards. Moreover, confining social action within the borders of State law, social responsibility as ethics is restricted by domain of positive law so that we are more responsible towards universal rights of humanity and the less responsible for the human beings (Marci 2001). Calhoun asserts that ‘nationalism is used to “trump” other identities or values’ (Calhoun 2007:98) to imply this hegemonic role of politics over other life structures. This condition is especially severe where cultural, communitarian and family bound are constitutive of competing concepts of democracy that are subjugated by the liberal representative regime.

difference between a political system in which several elites are in direct competition in the electoral arena, and a system where there exists a single power group which renews itself through co-opting fresh members. While the presence of an invisible power corrupts democracy, the existence of power groups which take it in turns to govern via free elections remains, at least to this day, the only concrete form in which democratic principles have been realized (Bobbio 1987:18–19).

A circulation of the elite's in power, does not imply that society is not colonised but simply that this is the 'only concrete form in which democratic principles have been realized'. Bobbio indeed recognises that this is 'incompatible with democratic ideals' and that it 'corrupts democracy'. While we make reference to liberal democracy, political-colonialism does not define any specific regime, but it does define any social dynamic and acknowledges the role (but not the specific actor) of the coloniser. Moreover, the circulation of political elites leaves very little space for new actors to emerge and the alternation of government-opposition, considered so salutary in liberal democracy, confirms that the elites remain the same acting as government or as opposition.

1.5.2 *Philosophical – from possessive individualism to abyssal thinking*

The philosophical conception of the individual and community, the kind of relation of society and the rule that regulates it, is well explained by C. B. Macpherson (1964a) who grounds the theory of 'possessive individualism' at the roots of liberal modern thought in Hobbes, the Levellers, Harrington and Locke. Macpherson maintains that possessive individualism is the foundation of liberal political thought and he defines it essentially as follows: 'man is free and human by virtue of his sole proprietorship of his own person, and that human society is essentially a series of market relations' (Macpherson 1964a:270).⁶⁷ From possessive individualism, Macpherson maintains that a rational theory of political obligations is based on two conditions: the capacity of individuals to see themselves as equal at least in a minimum respect – equal subordination to market logic – and the cohesion among those entitled to choose the government. In the XVIII-XIX century, the second condition (cohesion) was fulfilled through the undemocratic restriction of political voice to men of wealthy classes. Despite this, however, the growth of the working class conscience with the request of political

⁶⁷ In this theory, individuals are owner of themselves and enter in market relations with others (at least exchanging their own labour) as far as they want to. This implies that individuals owe nothing to society but the accession to society is a free choice of theirs. Marci affirms the symmetry of individualism and exchange, he maintains that in western modernity '[e]verything can be exchanged, everything can be quantified (people as well as things), except the principle of exchange which controls the whole system' (Marci 2013:185).

equality implied democratisation by expanding the basin of those who could elect a government and, consequentially, subtracted the former cohesion of the bourgeoisie. Thus, Macpherson continues that the universal franchise infringed the second condition (cohesion) because the wealthier and working class had opposed political interests. Moreover, the Canadian philosopher underlines that the very presence of class conscientiousness undermines the individualistic logic of market society based on possessive individualism. In sum: class questioned market as the logic of minimum equality among individuals and opened up to the possibility of envisaging different forms of justification of social and political obligation, not based on market but on class prerequisites. Actually, gender, or the right of women to vote, was another shock for the market society, although its emergence took a longer period as it took the next century to stratify within the political system of liberal regimes.

Macpherson's analysis of possessive individualism and the evolution of possessive market societies reinforces the arguments of this chapter and especially the section on 'Crisis of "political liberalism" or "a concept of state"'. There, it highlights the essential crisis of the liberal pillar, and of liberal representative regimes, due to the increasing relevance of the democratic one. Possessive individualism worked within the liberal pillar as far as it was legitimised by a largely undemocratic turnout (excluding workers and women). This confirms that the crisis relates to liberalism and not to democracy. Macpherson provides an argument to deepen the political-colonial meaning of this loss of adherence of the foundation of political obligations in liberal democratic regimes. In the situation explained above, where the political obligation is no longer deduced rationally from possessive individualism, the liberal state kept existing by reinventing the 'rational' justification of liberal 'democracy' in an international logic with colonial empires. In other words, while the emergence of the working class and its democratic demands tackled the undemocratic spirit of liberal regimes on the mainland, the same failing logic was replicated in the colonial relationship.⁶⁸ The condition of cohesion on the mainland was this time opposed to the inferiority of colonised countries and peoples

⁶⁸ Dossa (2007) maintains that possessive individualism is fundamental to understand development as continuation of neo-colonial enterprise which has adopted to advance the North, as opposed to the South, and indeed it has brought no or limited advantage to those who were to be developed.

(Macpherson 1964a:274). Political obligation was substantiated by colonialism – therefore on racism – when class became untenable.

The decolonisation of the second half of the XX century brought to the ‘dilemma’ of modern liberal democratic theory to its maximum extent. This is as ‘it must continue to use the assumption of possessive individualism, at a time when the structure of market society no longer provides the necessary conditions for deducing a valid theory of political obligation from these assumptions’ (Macpherson 1964a:275). The reason why the old theory of political obligation is no longer valid is due to the democratic expansion of the polity, from aristocrat and bourgeoisie man to the working class and later to women and colonised people.

Macpherson maintains that in opposition to this democratisation wave, war is used to artificially maintain the political cohesion of the polity with the creation of a higher general interest of the ‘nation’. However, as Macpherson underlines, war does not provide a widely accepted justification of liberal theory and implies substantial risks of destruction for the same nation that promotes it. The liberal democratic theory lacks behind in terms of rational elements of political obligation and those held in the past have fallen with the progressive unveiling of their abyssal logic.

To recapitulate and conclude, liberal democratic theory is based on a theory of political obligation that is substantiated by equality within the market society of individuals that have the freedom to engage in social relations. As far as individuals see themselves equal in the market and as far as there is cohesion among those who chose the government, there is a rational theory of political obligation. When this cohesion was questioned by the extension of those entitled to choose the government (because the working class, as a collective and not on an individual basis, could envisage different forms of government) the extension of franchise expanded the right to choose the government, and the theory of political obligation then lost its rational ground. On the one hand, working class conscience and political theorisation made it clear that the market did not guarantee the equality among individuals and on the other hand the cohesion of those choosing the government ceased. Through the ability of the wealthy class to retain political power by refurbishing national cohesion through colonialism and war, the liberal state keeps going but without rational grounds. This shows that the permanence of possessive market societies without political obligation is therefore

possible for the abyssal thinking, which implies that the three forms of radical exclusion, i.e., capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy are in place in the social and political dimension and allow for the liberal state to ‘keep going’.

1.5.3 *Social – from the abyssal line to social fascism*

The epistemologies of the South demonstrate how abyssal thinking was developed in Western modernity and rationality mainly through law and science and there retained epistemological superiority at the world level (Santos 2007a, 2007b). The political implications are the dual creation of a civil society in Europe with the radicalisation of the state of nature outside it. ‘Western modernity, rather than meaning the abandonment of the State of nature and the passage to civil society, means the coexistence of both the civil society and the state of nature, separated by an abyssal line whereby the hegemonic eye, located in the civil society, ceases to see and indeed declares as nonexistent the state of nature’ (Santos 2007a:50).

Santos outlines a tri-partite model of civil society composed of three concentric circles with the state at the centre. The first level is the ‘inner circle’ and includes a restricted group of people enjoying full rights and close relationship with the state. The second circle or the ‘strange civil society’ includes many more people benefitting from rights (civil and political) and the negation of rights (social, cultural and economic). The third circle is the periphery or the metaphorical South, the circle of civil society with more people excluded than in the other two circles and without rights, and therefore is the ‘uncivil civil society’ (Santos 2002b:456–58, 2003b:24–27).

With a similar approach, Chatterjee (2004, 2008) reconceptualises civil society in India and defends the existence of a political society which is excluded from the urban and bourgeois civil society. Political society collects the majority of the Indian population, which works in the informal sector in both urban and rural areas. Chatterjee concedes the existence of a group of people excluded also from political society: they are the lower castes left out from agriculture and the indigenous people (Tribals or *Adivasi*) in rural areas. These stratifications of civil society highlight the exclusionary logic bound to the use of the term showing how within liberal polities the abyssal logic is present.

Abyssal thinking defines what counts as universally valid with the rationality of adopting metaphorical ‘abyssal lines’ to divide what is: important and what is not important, visible and invisible, and existent and non-existent. Abyssal lines create a radical fracture between the two sides that it divides, ‘[w]hat most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the copresence of the two sides of the line’ (Santos 2007a:45). The abyssal lines are hidden at the same time as they are created, and are negated as much as they are used. Santos maintains that the historiography of abyssal thinking stems from the European colonization that favoured the abyssal division of the world into global North and global South by means of the division of coloniser and colonised.⁶⁹

The abyssal thinking divides ‘this side of the line’ (epistemological North), governed by the paradigm of regulation/emancipation and ‘the other side of the line’ (epistemological South), governed by the paradigm appropriation/violence. In the regulation/emancipation paradigm, the ontological presence of the rivals is regulated through struggle, emancipatory process and legalistic expansion of rights. The appropriation/violence paradigm is based on the ontological non-recognition of the ‘Other’, defined as racially inferior, and therefore, there is no logic of emancipation but only the logic of subjugation and violence. The paradigm appropriation/violence is the logic of radical exclusion and systematic oppression of those excluded. While in the epistemological North, the perspective of emancipation is regarded as basically possible and controlled by the paradigm of regulation. In the epistemological South, appropriation is substituted by violence to face resistance and struggle by the colonised, thereby, creating the impossibility of thinking of alternatives originating in the epistemological South. The abyssal thinking elaborated by Santos reflects the zones of being and non-being as elaborated by Franz Fanon (2008).⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Within neoliberal globalisation, the abyssal thinking is fostered by two top-down logics, namely ‘globalised localism’ and ‘localized globalism’, the first being the global hegemonic diffusion of a (generally western) localism and the second being the local consequences of such globalisation in the (generally destructed or silenced) local pre-globalisation practices and forms (Santos 2002a:25–26). Globalisation in the XX century spread the political framework of liberalism (including economic liberalisation) structured in three pillars: weak state (and its contraposition to civil society), liberal democracy, and supremacy of law and judicial system (Santos 2002a:9–13); in the academic, institutional and diplomatic discourse they are generally translated respectively as rule of law, democracy and human rights.

⁷⁰ For an interesting analysis of Santos and Fanon see Grosfoguel (2011)

The abyssal thinking fosters political-colonialism in three senses. In the first place, it gives to liberal democratic regimes a dual dimension of the possible and of the impossible, and of the institutional and of the informal, inferior, local, residual or useless. In the second place, the abyssal thinking maintains the impossibility of thinking of a legitimate political theory beyond the epistemological North, where the basis of liberal democratic regimes were created and substantiated. In the third place, the abyssal thinking perpetuates colonial relations of power within the national polity as compared to the relations of superiority-inferiority typical of colonial relations. While this third aspect concerns itself more closely with the former colonies – where old colonial relations were replaced by ‘internal colonialism’, with the increase of rational undermining of political obligations – these kind of relations are also increasingly in use in former metropolitan countries.

Wiredu (2007:160) maintains that the root of the exclusion of several ethnic groups from African liberal representative countries is due to the kind of regime that discourages the inclusion of different ethnic communities. Old forms of radical exclusion are related to the restriction of citizen’s right to an increasingly controlled and rationalised classed society, where the market invades the private areas related to health, education, access to basic goods and services – starting from water and healthy food but including access to energy (gas, electricity, combustibles) and the Internet. While the neoliberal agenda increases the predation of the market over these goods and services, they remain fundamental for the standard of living and are increasingly important to interact with the democratic paradigm. Therefore, the struggle for these goods and services is the struggle for the basic conditions necessary for a democratic debate, while the domination through the state by the market produces a radical exclusion from the definition of the conditions of those goods and services.

In the conditions of exclusion produced under political-colonial regimes, there enters other emerging forms of radical exclusions. They are related to the structural oppression of life perspective of wider society. Once more, the logic of the market: defines the working conditions, negates perspectives for a professionally recognised future to the youth, and relegates well educated professionals to the dependency of uncontrollable market dynamics. The state is an entity that is increasingly getting weaker when compared to international and non-state actors that control the market dynamics. The state’s role is neutralised and

diminished in the substance, although at the political level, it remains the fundamental authority of legitimation. The state operates at the level of coercion, by keeping under political-colonial control those movements and tendencies of subversion – or anti-political-colonial struggles – that put into question the political *status quo*. The paradigm appropriation/violence penetrates the liberal representative polity, and under neoliberal perspectives the national political elite is forced by international interests to put into practice the political-colonial regime in order to comply with the rule of international markets. Austerity measures – and the silencing of the dissent that they generate – are one of the globalised forms of oppression inscribed in the paradigm appropriation/violence of the political-colonial regimes.

Abyssal thinking provides responses to the dilemma of modern liberal democracy and is the *raison d'être* of political-colonialism:

it must continue to use the assumptions of possessive individualism, at a time when the structure of market society no longer provides the necessary conditions for deducing a valid theory of political obligation from those assumptions. Liberal theory must continue to use the assumptions of possessive individualism because they are factually accurate for our possessive market societies. [...] The individual in market society is human as proprietor of his own person. However much he may wish it to be otherwise, his humanity does depend on his freedom from any but self-interested contractual relations with others. His society does consist of a series of market relations (Macpherson 1964a:275).

Macpherson maintains that humanity depends on the freedom to choose one's contractual relation with others in a society that is merely a series of market relations. However, the struggle against colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy have negated this condition. This identifies the basic dynamic of radical exclusion of political-colonial regimes, that is, the unbalance of the forces that regulate the market (with the state's legitimisation) and controls the humanity of its 'customers'. The State is unable to preserve the condition of humanity and for the market humanity cannot be a condition because it is not recognised as an added value. In these circumstances radical exclusions are structural.

As Macpherson underlines, possessive individualism and market society go together. We can reject either both or none, but retaining them does not provide a valid theory of political obligation in liberal regimes, as far as these regimes pretend to be democratic. The subordination of everyone to the market is no guarantee of equality. In actuality, it never

was,⁷¹ and it does not provide a rational theory of obligation to support a political theory. The good point of abyssal thinking is that as much as exclusion was increasing its reach in the last centuries it was also increasing the front opposing it. While extension of the suffrage, historical decolonisation, welfare state and intercultural human rights instruments are historical intermissions of the development of abyssal thinking, it is continuously able to reinvent itself. We now live with the paradox of more internationalised relations among states (with respect to the historical colonial times) with an increased localisation of political-colonial oppression in each national constituency which takes the form of social fascism.

Santos defines six forms of social fascism (1998b:23–30, 2002b:453–56, 2005a:22–28, see also 2014:49–51). These are: social apartheid, parallel state, parastatal (subdivided into contractual and territorial fascisms), populist, of insecurity and financial social fascism. Santos maintains that it is not political fascism as we have seen it in past, but it is a ‘social and civilisational’ regime where the rule of liberal representative regimes is a convenient companion of neoliberal political perversion.⁷² Next, I will briefly review the six forms of social fascism.

Social apartheid is particularly evident in the urban geography of big metropolises that are divided between the fortified and privileged zone of civil society and the zones of the ‘state of nature’, i.e., places of social segregation and marginalisation. The parallel state social fascism is the double standard of the state with regards to the two zones above, where the first rules the law and in the second rules unlawful predatory violence. The third form is parastatal social fascism for which non-state actors take over the monopoly of violence and the regulatory capacity of the state in two forms. First, contractual social fascism is the unbalanced power of private actors in the provision of working conditions or social welfare services in a form that element retained as fundamental in the past but that has become

⁷¹ *De facto* they never were since they were always based in the radical exclusion on the basis of class, gender and race, as analysed in the previous section.

⁷² Santos explains that ‘[a]s a social regime, social fascism may coexist with liberal political democracy. Rather than sacrificing democracy to the demands of global capitalism, it trivializes democracy to such a degree that it is no longer necessary, or is even convenient, to sacrifice democracy to promote capitalism’ (Santos 2007a:61). And ‘[a]s social fascism coexists with liberal democracy, the state of exception coexists with constitutional normalcy, civil society coexists with the state of nature, and indirect rule coexists with the rule of law’ (Santos 2007a:62).

optional providing the non-state actors big social discretion over the people in contract with them. Second, territorial social fascism is characteristic of post-colonial states where capitalist non-state actors subtract the control and the power of control and regulate a certain territory to the state. The fourth, populist, form of social fascism for Santos is the promotion of lifestyles and forms of consumption that are unachievable to the majority and therefore undermine democratic participation and encourage political passivity. The fifth form is insecurity social fascism, which is fuelled by working instability and social destabilising events that create anxiety in social subjectivities concerning basic needs to health, pension, education and housing. Finally, there is financial social fascism, which is the rule of the international markets over national governments. Elites guided the states to accommodate requests of the transitional corporation by intensifying the liberalisation of markets, something that they are ordered by rating agencies, international financial organisations and multilateral organisations. The lack of democratic institutions at the international level does not even need a process of deregulation similar to that which occurred in domestic politics. Neoliberal globalisation is the extreme form of political-colonialism both for its ferocity and for its scale.

The state is directly responsible, negligent or abets non-state actors who are perpetrating all the forms of social fascism. This fallacy highlights the political-colonial character of the liberal regime: social fascism is only possible because the locus of decision making in modern states is centralised in an elite who are either directly committed to those non-state actors or are unable to intervene against the undemocratic rule that they implement. Social fascism is the face of the inconsistency of the democratic pillar in modern states and it is substantiated by the constitutional pillar because it is very often extremely legal. Besides being morally unjust, it generally takes advantage of the state void of power, that is, collective power which is privatised by the political-colonial logic. With social fascism the abyssal line has been displaced 'turning the colonial into an internal dimension of the metropolitan' (Santos 2007a:63).

1.5.4 *Political – the institutional abyssal line*

The core functional element of political-colonialism is a way of forming consensus as opposed to sharing different views of the political and expanding interaction in order to make

the most informed and inclusionary decision. Political-colonial consensus implies two major conditions: firstly, at regular intervals the whole society (as demarcated by the abyssal line in the social dimension) takes the responsibility of a net separation of those entitled to formulate the propositions upon which consensus will be expressed. Secondly, in the time between intervals of demarcation only those that are entitled bear formal political subjectivity and formulate or amend political statements (including politics and policies), while the rest of society can discuss and only informally express opinions on those statements. Besides its procedural openness, the form of inclusion/exclusion upon which political-colonialism functions is abyssal, meaning that it produces radical political exclusion, something which is explored here now in more detail.⁷³

The political abyssal line is the line that in practice radically divides the interest (and consequentially discourse, actions and decisions) of the elite from wider society, while in theory, the former should be a mirror of the latter. The radical exclusion exists in the diffused impracticality of the subjects in the latter group (i.e., wider society) to integrate or subvert the established power of the former (i.e., the elite). Panikkar identified the problem of reversibility and highlighted the issue of the technocracy of the state:

The difficulty, today, consists in making the process reversible, once it is discovered that by now power escapes from the authority of the people, because it is transmitted to a technocratic system that has liberated itself from any dependence whether in relation to the masses than from politicians (Panikkar 1995:83).

Kothari (2005:16) illustrates that Indian politics ‘is informed by the struggle between the democratic process and the technocratic drives of the elite that militate against such popular aspiration.’ He clarifies that the elite’s interest is the obstacle to democratisation as opposed to supposed political backwardness that is claimed to be due to India’s traditions. He actually argues that it is in those traditions that India finds its democratic resilience against

⁷³ Political-colonialism is not restricted to the largely theorised fact that democracy is not exhausted by the vote. It also includes the political and social consequences of this fact. For instance, that the interference of political debates about the construction of electoral support, electoral or governmental coalitions, in the debate of policy making. The governmental actions and parliamentary decisions are largely influenced by the need to increase electoral support or maintain government power as opposed to serve the common interest. As a consequence, the role of the citizen is reshaped in the framework of a utilitarian objectification, the citizen is the vote giver. When bottom up democratic demands emerge, they are dealt with care in relation to their implication in electoral support but less to the democratic value they hold. The paradigm of social inclusion is based on exchange as opposed to hospitality. The subtending law of inclusion is rational functionalist construct as opposed to a moral-based understanding of right (Marci 2013).

the authoritarian downfall. The obstacle to democracy in India is ‘the mindless pursuit of the modern development paradigm and the usurpation of community resources and lifestyle by the elite. This elite is keen to catch up with other societies than on working to provide equitable and humane conditions for its own people’ (Kothari 2005:16).

These scholars’ views are echoed by those held by grassroots political activists such as Aruna Roy:

In a democracy, the people are supposed to be sovereign. But we have no systems to enforce this [sovereignty]. The bureaucracy has colonial systems of accountability to their superiors, and the elected representatives have no need to go back to the people till the next election. As a result they invariably represent only themselves. The manipulations of decisions, corruption, and the arbitrary exercise of power continue[s], and the frustration of the [citizenry] grows (Roy 2000).

The distinction between the identification of political-colonialism at the philosophical, social and political level assigns different priorities. The influence of Indian tradition and social organisation in its politics is controversial, as we will explore below.

Ambedkar affirmed that ‘[p]olitical tyranny is nothing compared to social tyranny, and a reformer who defies society is a much more courageous man than a politician who defies the government’ (Ambedkar 2014 #20.6). Ambedkar advocated the priority of social reforms over political reforms, especially concerning the caste issue. The abyssal exclusions explored above are lived and felt in the daily life of societies as political exclusion is suffered, and is the root of social exclusion by polities. The subjects of society and polities are human beings whose life depends on both social and political conditions. Therefore, these conditions need to be tackled without solution of continuity.

The duality of coloniser-colonised (in the political sense) is maintained with a symmetry with historical colonial times. For example, in British India there was a simulacrum of democracy with elections and a regime of representation and administration. It excepted, however, that the British were the ultimate decision makers and beneficiaries of collective decisions. In political-colonial regimes, the ultimate decision makers and beneficiaries are not identifiable with a foreign colonising power but with refined elites, that, although not definitely demarcated and segregated from society, are equally disjoined from it. The difference in the implementation of civil liberties and human rights between historical and

political-colonialism certainly variates in terms of degree or intensity but is ontologically present in both. The line that segregates the elite from society is the ‘political abyssal line’ that finds in the state its normative framework. The abyssal logics: destroy the democratic ideal in order to defend the democratic regime, destroy democracy in order to defend it (Santos 2007a:57–58), and defends the form of the state and its institutions, negating political subjectivity beyond the vote.

Liberal democracy confined democracy to the political realm, strictly conceived of as the field that concerns the state's areas of intervention. This rendered the democratic process susceptible to constituting an island of democracy in a wide ocean of social despotism (Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXII).

As analysed above, Macpherson highlights how possessive individualism and the market society were historically characterised by an undemocratic character related to the homogeneity of those entitled to choose the government. In other words, liberal representative regimes need a subjugation to be in place, that is, a coloniser and a colonised. These were represented in the XVIII and the XIX centuries as the wealthier classes vs. the working classes and women. From the XIX-XX century, coloniality shifted to the global scale in the international dimension of the colonial empires. In present times of neoliberal globalisation, the domination of market elites vs. political customers reframes the old oppressive paradigm within the new shape taken by the political-colonial relationship. Throughout its history, liberal representative regimes have highlighted a fundamental characteristic that makes it a politically colonial system, that is, the interests of the representatives are different with respect to those of the represented. This is due to structural differences between: wealthier classes – working class, colonisers – colonised and neo-colonialism, and neoliberal speculation – politically passive masses. The gender structural difference crosscuts the whole development and is as yet an unresolved structural divide of political-colonialism with different cultural roots in different polities. The abyssal logic of liberal democracy is the monoculture of those who represent. While of course there are differences among different parties, the institutional complex boxes the political position within defined political limits so that whoever is in the position to govern is almost obliged to follow the path indicated by the monoculture. The case of Syriza and the Greek debt crisis, especially in the summer of 2015, serves as a bright and recent example.

Political-colonialism is a metaphor for a regime of domination of society by an elite based on a form of radical political exclusion and subjugation. At the social level, we have seen (as highlighted above) how political-colonialism moves the abyssal line from the division between coloniser and colonised geographies to the same division within the polity of both, social fascism is being the representation of such country-replicated forms of radical exclusion.

At the political level, the movement of the abyssal line is regulated by an epistemological shift, albeit one which is more subtle, because it is played within the space formerly dominated by the regulation-emancipation paradigm, and it is within the space of this side of the line, that now compressed within itself it subdivides into different scenarios of political knowledge and ignorance. The political division takes place within the state between its institutions and the majority of the people. Knowledge as regulation is the domain of the state's institution and political representation. It announces 'liberal democracy' as the best political 'order' invented by human modernity that contrasts with the 'chaos' of not, or not-yet, democratic states.⁷⁴ Knowledge as emancipation is the domain of society where knowledge represents solidarity and ignorance represent colonialism. The two forms of knowledge order (of the state's institutions) and solidarity (within society) are in a dialectical tension with the political ignorance of chaos (within the state's institutions) and colonialism (of society).

Knowledge-as-regulation is a form of knowledge constructed along a trajectory between ignorance conceived of as chaos and knowledge conceived of as order; whereas knowledge-as-emancipation is constructed along a trajectory between ignorance conceived of as colonialism and knowledge conceived of as solidarity. Colonialist ignorance consists in refusing to recognize the other as an equal and converting the other into an object. Historically, this form of ignorance presupposes three distinct forms: the savage, nature, and the orient (Santos 2010b:230).

In political-colonialism, colonialist ignorance confuses the indefiniteness and dynamism of the people (see above) with its structural inferiority. The people in this case are

⁷⁴ Wiredu contests right away that the majoritarian system of liberal democracy is felt as a failing system by African and other peoples of the South who have experiences with consensual democracy. 'Such a suggestion should not impress any African who belongs to an ethnic group with a pre-colonial history of government by consensus. Nor, actually, should it impress too many people from other parts of the world, for the consensual approach to decision-making in political as well as non-political contexts is known in other parts of the world too' (Wiredu 2007:159–60).

considered to be the chaotic mass, characterised by the unfruitful passivity of voter basins that are to be bought within the electoral market⁷⁵ alone and then dominated through established political forms.⁷⁶ This ignorance is based upon the assumption that people have no politically convenient creativity for the elite. This assumption may be supported by two hypotheses: the first is that what is convenient for the people is other than what is convenient for the elite. The second is that the creativity of the people is dispersive for the political interests that the elite are able to represent. The first hypothesis denotes a colonisation based on societal interests, the second characterises a cultural disqualification of the people and the inadequateness of the political form that is in use. Between the two extremes, political-colonialism is implemented through a merged hypothesis that combines elements of both transforming the people into the simple 'object' colonised by the order of the State to legitimises political power.

If, as Santos maintains, colonialism is the form of ignorance and solidarity is the form of knowledge of emancipation, then, political regimes are politically-colonial because they ignore the knowledge of solidarity (or sharing of power relations) which is the form of knowledge of the emancipatory paradigm. Ignorance as colonialism is radical exclusion and only an intercultural concept of democracy can go beyond it because the paradigm of regulation-emancipation is structural in Western modernity and to find democratic conceptions that go beyond the Western political culture.⁷⁷ This why Gandhi insisted on a

⁷⁵ Gaxie (2003:28 footnote #2) clarifies the difference between 'political market' – or electoral market – and the 'the market of political power' – regulating the transaction between those elaborating public policies and those affected by them. In the latter, it is possible to explain the different position that elites take in government or opposition, in the former takes place the interaction for the creation and consolidation of elites.

⁷⁶ Gaxie analyses the electoral market and the dynamic of the political sphere showing that the formation of the elite goes beyond elections, for instance with bodies of national responsibility nominated or through concurs defining public administrators. Gaxie shows also that the elite is constituted through internal and external processes of incorporation and acceptance/rejection and that the limited role of 'profane' (as nonprofessional) populations – beyond the vote – is of an exceptional character, controlled, permitted or limited by the elected representative. The elite is interested in the confidence of the profanes and to their neutrality (Gaxie 2003:7–43).

⁷⁷ The metaphor of the abyssal line is very useful to understand the epistemological geography of an intercultural conception of democracy. On the one hand, liberal democracy was thought and developed 'on this side of the line', on the former coloniser's zone or the metropolitan zone – the zone structured with the political form regulation/emancipation. On the other hand, this same zone expresses a form of political ignorance that is unable to escape political-colonialism (of society) as metaphoric implementation of its liberal-representative regime. Alternatives can be researched moving South, on the other side of the line. However, the modern paradigm of knowledge has negated the epistemological relevance of that zone and declared the zone of radical inferiority. As a consequence, for modern political thinking it is impossible to look for political alternatives 'on

civilisational shift in his search for a democratic alternative to Western civilisation. In the next chapter, both Gandhi and the epistemological construction of intercultural perspectives for democracy are explored.

The political-colonial *status quo* is structural because the political establishment deviates from the people's interests and because the systems of check and balance have been historically proven to be insufficient to prevent the formation of the elite's monoculture. Political electoral customers are forced into a condition of being, either: customers of the political market, rebels, politically passive (which implies that they accept political irrelevance), or voluntary servants (Boétie 2011). The space of empowerment provided by the liberal representative regime is entangled in the complexity of institutional forms and procedures that trigger a tension between empowerment and transparency. This is what Canovan considers to be the democratic paradox: 'that empowerment undermines transparency. Attempts to give a political voice to the population at large tend to produce institutions that separate people and power in the very process of mediating between them' (Canovan 2002:28). Thus, the residual space of empowerment, although bigger with respect to authoritarian regimes, is self-exclusionary and political-colonialism assumes the form of hegemony and not authoritarianism in liberal representative regimes.⁷⁸ Political-colonialism

the other side of the line', in the South, but, paradoxically, this is where alternatives to the political ignorance of colonialism are to be located. It is also fundamental to acknowledge that the South has been subject to 'modernisation' through the paradigm of (political) progress, through domination and violence. Most of the political forms of the South have been threatened and diminished in meaning. But the South, as the North, can reinvent re-emerge, re-create or re-vive these forms. The point here is not to have a romantic idea of the political creativity and democratic advancement of political forms elaborated in the South because they are just as incomplete as the liberal representative model. In fact, the epistemologies of the South acknowledge that general theories are untenable and do not look for a general theory in the South, they accept the incompleteness and the dynamism advocating intercultural translation able to enrich all parts in the democratic dialogue, both the North and the South and the different Norths and Souths. The paradox is that the North needs to re-evaluate, re-consider, re-learn – something possible only after having unlearned previous prejudice – those political visions; dialogue with the incompleteness of their proposals that encompasses progressive aspects as well as limitations.

⁷⁸ Liberal representative democracy as a political regime is legitimised by the basic proceduralism that allows the election of the elite, with all the limits connected to the fact that the elites control the mechanisms, juridical and social rules of elections. It colonises the minds of the people and maintains it in a state of acceptance. Political-colonialism is not authoritarianism because the system is formally democratic but substantially colonial. In totalitarian elections, voting serves the legitimisation of a power that pre-exists. In liberal representative elections, it serves also the choice of the power elite. The legitimisation function of elections remains and this is the critical point: legitimisation to operate politically without need to continuously re-legitimise the elites own political power until the next election. People have some freedoms and rights (stratified in different civil societies) but the idea of democracy they have to comply with is restricted and limited within an

is indeed a form of political hegemony of a specific political knowledge and its related political experience over other political forms, whether they be alternative or complementary to the hegemonic one. Liberal political regimes adopt different forms in different contexts but they are united by the vertical distribution of power and the awareness of a lack of realistic alternatives.

The political abyssal line is fundamental for the democratic system to function, because without a concentration of political power the problem of scale would re-emerge. People can move from one side to the other of the line and the line itself can move swiftly. The elite are not completely foreclosed and they do encompass some brilliant individuals, however they may be co-opted to the political-colonial system and making substantial changes to the political-colonial *status quo* is difficult for them. The disaffection with politics is therefore not the failure of the democratic paradigm, but the acknowledgment of depoliticised citizens whose role within the regime is to be politically colonised, or to be politically insignificant outside the electoral market logic. Rebels struggle against the colonisers, i.e., the political elite, and generally engage in intellectual and political movements with a thematic focus (environment, education, health, gender, sexual related rights and so on). Before advocating the democratic civilisational shift, Gandhi was one such rebel because he struggled against the political elite for the Human Rights of the Indian community in South Africa and later on in India for struggles that included political independence. Although, limiting the reading of Gandhi's political activism and the message of his struggle within the political-colonial system hides the very fact that he opposed the instauration of that very system for the future of India.

For Macpherson, the 'individual in a possessive market society is human in his capacity as proprietor of his own person; his humanity does depend on his freedom from any

institutionally legitimated knowledge with the monopoly of institutional forms. As in colonial regimes, there were democratic forces (the colonisers) to hold power, even now 'democratic' forces hold power; in both cases, there is a shortage of democracy. In colonial times, it was an extended shortage based on a fixed racial abyssal line. In liberal regimes, the line is less rigid and the possibility to cross it is wider, which makes the colonial dimension more subtle and sophisticated. In authoritarian regimes the reaction is organised with more difficulty but also with more resolution by opponents. Thus, liberal representative democracy is a system that anaesthetises the body politics (nation). The populist response to this anaesthetisation is weak when it gathers the dissatisfaction but fails to give consistency to perspectives that tackle the political-colonial verticality. It is stronger when it allows the expansion of the space of horizontality of power sharing.

but self-interested contractual relations with others; his society does consist of a series of market relations' (Macpherson 1964a:271–72).

For Santos, the relationship between freedom and humanity is also basic, as:

The other side of the abyssal line is the realm of beyond legality and illegality (lawlessness), of beyond truth and falsehood (incomprehensible beliefs, idolatry, magic). These forms of radical negation together result in a radical absence, the absence of humanity, modern subhumanity. The exclusion is thus both radical and nonexistent, as subhumans are not conceivably candidates for social inclusion (Santos 2007a:52).

The translation of subhumanity within the political sphere is well rendered by the lack of political freedom to share power relations. The political-colonial system as a political market neutralises the freedom of the individual whenever it goes beyond the electoral market or informal participation in civil society. By so doing, the political-colonial regime ontologically neutralises political subjects, as they are confined between the electoral market and informal political activism or, more frequently, political inaction. Besides being a regime that is globally exported, liberal representative democracy largely ignores the demands of group inclusion provided by other democratic forms.⁷⁹ This side of the abyssal line, the institutional sphere of representative politics defines the role of appropriation and violence of the 'other side' of the political abyssal line. In the realm of politics, the abyssal line contributes to reducing the political to the institutional, and in silencing or co-opting voices beyond intuitional representation. Examples include the political representation of protests against big infrastructure projects such as the No-TAV or No-Dal Molin in Italy or the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* social movement against dams in the Narmada River in India.

As far as individual informal political liberty does not overrun the rule of radical exclusion of the liberal representative regimes, it is unlimited and even encouraged by the state, provided it remains at the margin. The street, the movement, and the associations of civic engagement are all beyond the realm of politics, and they enter the public sphere in times

⁷⁹ For instance Wiredu (Wiredu 1999, 2007) analyses the role of consensus in African democratic traditions. Villoro (2007) elaborates on communitarian democracy in Ecuador, Bolivia and Mexico (neo-Zapatist experience). The constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009) innovate the liberal pillar by including intercultural and plurinational and foresee three forms of democracy (Dargatz and Oblitas 2012; Rivas 2013; Santos and Exeni 2012; Santos and Grijalva 2012). The different epistemological perspective is inscribed in the shift between political imaginations: 'if governments imagine post-capitalism from capitalism, indigenous movements imagine post-capitalism from pre-capitalism' (Santos 2010a:12).

of tectonic movement of the abyssal line. However, until then, they are to remain marginal, ignored, and silenced at the political level. Jürgen Habermas has made this point clear as he states:

Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres. [...] [T]hey do form the organizational substratum of the general public of citizens. More or less emerging from the private sphere, this public is made of citizens who seek acceptable interpretations for their social interests and experiences and who want to have an influence on institutionalized opinion- and will-formation (1996:367).

In this optimal condition of the liberal public sphere described by Habermas, civil society has a protagonist role in bursting the deliberative process, as one of its tasks is precisely to vitalise the communication process in the public sphere. Conversely, the limited ability of the public sphere to solve issues is reflected in the partial role (recognised by Habermas) given to the civil society in terms of political action. Its role on that matter is the ‘opinion- and will-formation institutionalized in parliamentary bodies and courts’ (Habermas 1996:371). In other words, the public sphere and more specifically, civil society, has a consultative role with regard to the political power.⁸⁰

The new ‘messy cartography’ of the substantial lack of conditions for the justification of political obligation confuses the former geographical distinction. ‘The time of a neat divide between the Old and the New World, between the metropolitan and the colonial, is over. The line must be drawn at as close a range as is necessary to guarantee security. What used to be unequivocally this side of the line is now a messy territory cut though by a meandering abyssal line’ (Santos 2007a:57).

The South as the place of exclusion and oppression is metaphoric and not geographical (Santos 1995:506–19), as it exists within liberal representative regimes (as well as outside them). The liberal representative regimes include the paradigm appropriation/violence within its polity and this is not an accident but a structural condition.

⁸⁰ Cook (2001) denotes that in Habermas the influence of the citizens in the decision making processes is very limited and also, that the role of civil society is limited. She underlines that for Habermas the circulation of power from the people to the government is restricted to the case in which two conditions are realised: first the political system ignores the will of the people and, second, citizens protest through subversive actions.

The form of appropriation and violence of political abyssal thinking are based on the realist assumption that no better political regime can be constituted and liberal representative democracy shall be defended against the eventuality of creating wider circles of power sharing. Repressions carried out against those who contradict this assumption can take soft or hard forms and different degrees of brutality. This could result, for example, in the case of a public school hosting alter-wordlist protestors (as happened in Genoa in 2001) or in the open air of local communities manifesting against the construction of big infrastructure.

The paradigmatic substance of the political form of the other side of the line remains unchanged, as 'appropriation involves incorporation, cooptation, and assimilation, whereas violence involves physical, material, cultural, and human destruction' (Santos 2007a:51). Subtle appropriation results when the political discourse is invested in to denigrate forms of political action or political initiatives. Political exclusion is structured through the centralisation of power in the Institutions of the state through the implementation of low intensity democracy, that is, a regime where democracy – understood as popular sovereignty and equal power relations – occurs almost exclusively to legitimise the elite through elections. Other forms of democratic engagement, if not enclosed in accepted party structures are considered to be residual, superfluous, useless, and eventually, non-political and merely civic. Citizens and their grassroots movements and organisations stay on the other side of the line, where encroachments to this side of the political abyssal line are rare and imply acclimatisation in the political system as far as they conform to it.

2 Gandhian alternative to political-colonialism

Two decades ago Santos (1991, 1999:203–42) elucidated the origin of the political crisis that has become more and more intense in recent years. The main issue stands in the strict connection between democracy and citizenship, what is: the perspectives and the limit of the political paradigm of liberal representative democracy. The theory of such a paradigm was historically regulated by the principle of the 'state' that is increasingly dominated by the rules of the 'market' and opposed to the relevance of the 'community'. This process has polarised the state-civil society duality and has hierarchized civil society into three spheres. Liberal democracy polarises and atomises all the life spheres (i.e., political, social, and moral). This is something which is contrary to the political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, who did not justify the division of the political from the social and moral, and therefore state from society.

The state's power is juxtaposed to civil society, – that is, civil society is codified as a monolithic group of atomised individuals whose subjectivities and inequalities are neutralised (or hidden) – and the state is the guarantor of basic political liberties. As state and civil society are juxtaposed the political establishment (the state) and the people (organised in civil society) are separated and opposed. All spheres of life are flattered into the political oblivion of the private sphere that does not pertain to the political, which is the main domain of the public sphere. The state represents an individual needing uniformity, which implies the need to control of all aspects of life, and by reducing politics to the state, it attains the means to conquer and maintain power (Panikkar 1995:42, 63–64).

The political prevalence of liberal representative democracy, through the election of representatives, confines democracy in the public sphere and liberty is regulated by the rules of the market that dominate all other social spheres.⁸¹ The state's power is provided by the social contract,⁸² which acts as the form by which autonomous citizens give authority to the

⁸¹ Above we saw that Santos identifies six social structures in capitalist societies, the 'state structure' is the predominant inbuilt in the social contract and the public sphere. As the state, all other social structures produce a form of power, law and epistemology in its own relative space: home-place, production, market, community, citizenship and world-space (Santos 2003a:309–46).

⁸² Aguiló analyses Santos' studies on globalisation, citizenship and democracy, and defines it a 'neoliberal social contract' (Aguiló 2008).

state out of their own interest. However, this contract does not include nature, is limited to the territory (that is under the control of the state) and to public affairs. As a result, the social contract is both inclusionary and exclusionary (see also Marci 2013; Santos 1998b, 2005a). The power of the state is constantly reasserted through the electoral vote. The right to vote is the main characteristic of citizenship, and is a right that exhausts minimal citizen political participation and accomplishes the requirement of renewing the social contract with the state who is the guarantor of citizenship and democracy.⁸³ Through the vote and the social contract the citizens autonomously, and atomically, symbolically renew their statute of what Étienne de La Boétie defined as 'voluntary servitude' to the state and the political elite that they elect (Boétie 2011).

Aguiló affirms that Santos' approach develops the perspective of democracy together with that of citizenship, as democratisation implies to bring democracy within the private sphere of life from which liberal democracy has evaded political debates. Citizenship is 'a process of experimentation, construction and learning of new participatory political practices and of new democratic forms of social relation' (Aguiló 2009:20). The experimentalism advocated and practiced by Gandhi goes beyond representative democracy and the vote. It embraces a different relation between the state and civil society and reconceptualises civil society as a political dimension which pervades all spheres of life and is not reduced to the public (mostly institutional) space.

Liberal representative democracy, which is based on a capitalist economy, is the most advanced political regime to regulate political relations in big polities.⁸⁴ Participatory practices

⁸³ On the one hand, with the vote citizen's delegate their political responsibility, while on the other hand, the vote is the limit of their alienation because people do not feel that anything substantial is requested from them besides respect for the law and being informed. Politics is over for them because they are not obliged to continue to participate in politics but they can if they want to. On the contrary, a more democratic perspective involves a tendency to include civic participation and a living civil society counting informal participation. The vote does not imply that people do not want to defend their political ideas and interests but that they delegate this advocacy. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) write that Western liberal democracies generally invite their voters to choose between 'packages' of programmes, commitment, outlooks and parties and to define their identity between social, territorial, religious and economic cleavages. Only rarely are citizens called to vote on single issues.

⁸⁴ Liberal representative democratic regimes have different histories, constitutions and dynamics, but they all share a few basic characteristics. Therefore the liberal representative regimes can serve as a coherent object of study when considered from a few basic features that include the division of powers (legislative, executive, judiciary), the principle of representation implemented through elections and free mandate, and the foundation of civil and political rights (such as free speech and freedom of association). The Council of Europe

can provide a democratisation of this democratic paradigm, by way of putting a series of cracks into the homogeneity of the system. This is similar to the struggle that Holloway (2010) explains, in which it is possible to create cracks in the capitalist system in order to oppose and provide alternatives to its hegemony. Creating cracks in the representative democratic system – that is experiencing participatory, bottom-up, democratic models – will bring a new social order beyond the capitalist economy and sociality (Santos 1991:179, 1999:233). What Santos proposes is to unite these cracks in order to build a non-hegemonic alliance. He states that ‘the political side of an epistemology of knowledge is the incompleteness of political proposals and the need to join them without a general theory’ (Santos 2010c:74).

When analysing Gandhi’s political proposal from the perspective of the epistemologies of the South, I was prompted to rethink the political through the emerging lessons of participatory experimentalism in order to un-dogmatise the relationship between state and civil society, the elite and the people. What does Gandhi’s proposal imply in terms of political categorisation? What is the impact of the post-colonial proposal in approaching categories that underlie liberal representative democracy?

2.1 Gandhi’s democratisation

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has been the inspiration for many generations of social and political activists in India and elsewhere. During his lifetime, he was the main leader of the freedom movement against British colonial rule in India, and nowadays, he is a figure who is regarded in the highest esteem for his non-violent method, moral leadership and visionary capacity. Although his ideas have received controversial approval (for instance, to what concerns social reforms and non-industrial development), he is the political reference of the discourse of most Indian political parties. Most importantly here, he was a philosopher who’s thought was highly integrated with his social political engagement, showing he had a deep theoretical commitment (Bilgrami 2002; see also Suhrud 2005).⁸⁵ The junction of his

lists five characteristics for good institutions: ‘Free and fair elections, a functioning opposition, the separation of powers, the vertical distribution of powers [principle of subsidiarity] and good governance’ (Jagland 2015:59).

⁸⁵ Gandhi the philosopher-activist of alternative civilisation is one of the ‘Gandhis’ that Ashis Nandy (2000) did only partially (in his third ideal-type) account for, while he mentions four ‘Gandhis’ surviving Mahatma’s death. This Gandhi is less known with respect to the others, but he is emerging strongly in the reflection of scholars and activists as one milestone of an ecological alternative to capitalism and colonialism. Nandy’s four Gandhi ideal-types are: the nationalist leader of independence (obsoleted by his own fellows after independence); the boring Gandhi of old-style Gandhians, not involved in politics and wearing *khadi*, more

thought and activism constitute a multifaceted response to the colonial and political-colonial regimes. Santos points out that: ‘Gandhi is arguably the thinker/activist of modern times who thought and acted more consistently in nonabyssal terms. Having lived and experimented the radical exclusion typical of abyssal thinking, Gandhi does not swerve from his goal of building a new form of universality capable of liberating both the oppressor and the victim’ (see also Santos 1995:511, 2007a:64).

India’s social and political trajectory is profoundly indebted to Gandhi, as he influenced the countries: spirit of the constitution, deliberative democratic practice, dynamism, spirit of decentralisation (that unevenly emerged in Indian state regulation), and the constitutional amendments of 1993 defining the *panchayati raj*⁸⁶ (Gupta 2009, 2013:45–67; Prasad 2011; Rudolph and Rudolph 2006:20–31). Nonetheless, the political landscape he desired was evaded by the people closest to him, starting with the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who followed the path of industrial modernisation and of a liberal representative political regime (see Rudolph and Rudolph 2006:3–59).

To explore the democratic idea by Gandhi, a primary source used were his own words, however Gandhi was not a systematic writer. Neither was he preoccupied with coherence in his writing, for he held the ‘search after truth’ as foremost important (H 29-4-1933).⁸⁷ Nonetheless, he was a prolific writer, who wrote and edited a number of journals that substantially characterise his social and political thoughts.⁸⁸ The style of his written

appealing abroad than in India. The third Gandhi is the anti-capitalist activist opposing multinational corporations and big infrastructural projects and the fourth Gandhi is the mythical one, the pacifist and non-violent prophet that is an empty flag, waved without knowing him very keenly, but as a symbol against injustice and inhumanity.

⁸⁶ *Panchayati raj* is the system of decentralised government introduced by the Congress party (under Rajiv Gandhi) in 1993. This system recalls the model of village republics advocated by Mahatma Gandhi although its introduction has been uneven and the implementation is dependent from the state centric structure. (Goel and Rajneesh 2009; Mathur 2013)

⁸⁷ Gandhi’s Journals articles are cited here in short as follows: 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), cited as CWMG Vol. N p. N. All these and other key texts are available online on the website of the Gandhi Heritage Portal (www.gandhiheritageportal.org).

⁸⁸ Gandhi edited and wrote in the journals *Indian Opinion* (in South Africa), *Young India* (Gandhi 1931) and *Harijan* (Gandhi 1956). Articles, speeches, correspondence and other texts have been gathered in 100 volumes of his collected works (Gandhi 1994). Gandhi wrote a number of books (including *Hind Swaraj*, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *Constructive Programme Its Meaning and Place*). Gandhi’s disciples compiled many other books on specific arguments collecting parts of Gandhi’s articles and public texts or speeches. Among others, *The mind of the Mahatma Gandhi* (Gandhi 1967), deserves

contributions illustrate his indivisible aim to reconnect theory and practice. In writing, he is clear, direct to the point and uses a language that is widely accessible. He did not intend to write a comprehensive theory inherent to the spheres of knowledge and life experience in which he worked during his life. He also recognised that writing was an instrument for social change, as he affirmed: ‘writing is a by-product; I write to propagate my ideas. Journalism is not my profession’ (H 18-8-1946). In order to understand his thinking, the reader must be aware of the context and of the historical value of his texts as primary instruments of social emancipation. His writing was strictly connected with his social activism and ‘using the print media for the dissemination of his ideas was part of a clear strategy’ (Chadda 2010:XXI–XXII). Gandhi’s most important work was not writing, however significant it has been, but rather, was his own life and the way he experimented moral and social development before leading his fellows to follow him. His civil disobedience campaigns, his role as social reformer, and his spiritual leadership are partially codified in his and others texts. The source for this study, however, was his social and political action. Less than one year before being assassinated, he stated, ‘[w]hat I have done will endure, not what I have said or written’ (H 1-5-1947). In order to reconstruct Gandhi’s concept of democracy I will go through some key points of his: discourse concerning his alternative civilisational proposal, his ontology of individual and community and the relation among the two, the state and governance as self-rule or *swaraj* and, finally, key civilisational alternative concepts such as *ahimsa*, *satyagraha* and *ashram*.

2.1.1 Civilisational democratisation

Gandhi has an highly critical view of liberal representative democracy (Pantham 1983) and insisted on a grassroots and directly participatory democratic model, an alternative model of democracy with respect to the elitist liberal one.⁸⁹ He devoted his entire life to the visionary ambition of making India the champion of this democratic model, but not in opposition to, but rather, in an open dialogue with other civilisations. Independence from colonial rule was for him only one part of full independence that, in order to be achieved required a democratic development of the country under a vision of self-rule, something

a special mention for its remarkable consideration among Gandhian scholars. Gandhi had read and approved the first edition (1945).

⁸⁹ Democracy as power sharing in the Gandhian view is democracy as autonomy and self-government from which the liberal pillar emerges as an outcome, limited in scope and not needing to be a pre-condition.

incompatible with a strong representative, procedural and elitist model of democracy, although not incompatible with a limited form of morally based political representation. For Gandhi, independence (at all its levels, i.e., individual, social, political), emancipation, and democracy are combined in a true civilisation and he adopted the word '*swaraj*' (meaning self-rule or self-government) to express them.

A reading of Gandhi in light of his social activism must begin with his seminal work *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Gandhi 1938). This small book was vehemently hand-written while returning to South Africa from England in November 1909 on board the ship the SS Kildonan Castle. It was published for the first time in Gujarati in the columns of *Indian Opinion* (11-18 December 1909). In this book, Gandhi criticises the model of Western civilisation that is based on the achievement of material comfort and the consequent notion of development. He instead put forward the Indian alternative that departs from an opposite concept of individual (as we will see in the next chapter section):

Civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and our passions. So doing, we know ourselves. The Gujarati equivalent for civilisation means "good conduct" (Gandhi 1938 Chap. XIII).⁹⁰

There is a foundational difference between Western civilisation and the concept of civilisation as defended by Gandhi. In *Hind Swaraj*, his tone was intentionally harsh so as to mobilise Indians against the British. In fact, he had 'toned down his statements in this respect in later years' (Hardiman 2003:71). Gandhi was not an enemy of Western civilisation but of the hegemonic role of its colonial rule. He attempted to diminish the philosophical, epistemological and scientific preponderance of Western civilisation in order to strengthen an intercultural dialogue among civilisations. His own sources included Western and non-Western authors and texts: religious books (such as the Bible and Upanishads and Gita), religious personalities (such as the Buddha, Socrates, Jesus and Muhammad the prophet of Islam) and modern thinkers, political and spiritual leaders like Raychandbhai (or Shrimad Rajchandra), Gopal Krishna Gokhale, William Mackintire Salter, Henry Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy,

⁹⁰ The term *sudharo*, used by Gandhi in the original Gujarati version of *Hind Swaraj*, may be translated to mean 'good way of life': *su* meaning 'good' and *dharo* meaning 'way of life' (Hardiman 2003:68; Skaria 2002:364–65).

Giuseppe Mazzini and John Ruskin) (Gandhi 1927 Chap. 20, 26, 40, 47, 82, 95, 1938 appendix I). His notion of civilisation, however, was strictly related to the vision of democracy. His discourse was so severe that it advocated that colonial rule was better than Indian rule under a Western kind of regime. After, he defended the incomplete independence of Italy from Austria, due to the lack of self-rule by Italians who migrated from the control of a (Austrian) king to another (Italian). For India, he envisaged a civilisational alternative whose intermediate objective was to conquest indolence through non-violence, a civilisation weapon that acts as an alternative to the arms and brute force characteristic of Western civilisation. Gandhi wrote:

to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanize it. Then her condition will be just as pitiable as that of Europe. This means, in short, that India must accept European civilisation, and if that is what we want, the best thing is that we have among us those who are so well trained in that civilisation. We will then fight for a few rights, will get what we can and so pass our days. But the fact is that the Indian nation will not adopt arms, and it is well that it does not (Gandhi 1938 Chap. XV).

Gandhi recognised that under Western liberal regimes it is possible to struggle for ‘a few rights’ and he was convinced that this would become the ambition for Indians under a liberal representative democratic India. He rejected this as a universal ambition and proposed an alternative civilisational vision. By negating the absolute universal value of Western civilisation, in order to put forward the Indian alternative that he promoted for his country-fellows, Gandhi did not attempt a bold negation of the values of Western civilisation nor to sanction an unconditional incompatibility of Western modernity and India. Also in *Hind Swaraj*, he opposed Western civilisation but he did not coherently and intentionally negate the value of Western civilisation (P. A. Mishra 2012:20). Gandhi was aiming at a heuristic attempt to contradict the supposed inferiority of the Indian culture assigned to it by the British through the colonial dichotomy of modern-civilised vs. retrograde-uncivilised. He worked at the empirical level by redefining the civilisational discourse with the objective of *swaraj* (P. A. Mishra 2012:18). At the core of Gandhi’s civilisational discourse were two political objectives: first, to encourage many people (Indians and foreigners) to deconstruct the hegemony of (Western) civilisation and second, give the Indian people a self-consciousness (Hardiman 2003:71; Parekh 1989:208–9). *Hind Swaraj* is the text in which Gandhi polarises the dichotomy of civilisations with the objective of independence for India and the political intention of developing a self-rule, substantial democracy in the country. Civilisation and democracy are

connected with the *trait d'union* of being alternative to the Western model that produced both colonial and democratic forms. He rejected the colonisers' political proposal and contrasted the idea that the same principles and forms of British India would guide a post-colonial India.

Gandhi's inter-civilisational approach was based on a complete view of a balanced life and renouncing to the primacy of power – this is a genuine dialogue of colonised-coloniser against colonialism and capitalism proposed by Gandhi in his revision of Hindu's worldview. Parel (2003) provides a brilliant argument to understand Gandhi's philosophy of civilisation, and he shows that it is open to three oppositional forces: Western, Muslim and high caste Hindu (especially those supporting *hindutva* – 'hinduness'). After *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi clarified that he does promote true civilisation, an ideal that is not attained but that can be fostered in accordance with an equilibrium between wealth, passion, ethics and spirituality. Parel connects this to such a philosophy of *purusharthas*, the Hindu four purposes of life that are *dharma* (ethics), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (passion) and *moksha* (spiritual liberation). Gandhi defends an equilibrium of these four objectives and he sustains that besides being applied to individuals they should be applied to civilisations. He did not advocate for an otherworldly life based on the pure search of *moksha* but did advocate for an equilibrium of wealth (and power) and passion under the aegis of the ethical law of *dharma*, with the acknowledgement that contingency does not exhaust life, but is a part of it, and therefore the ultimate objective is otherworldly and must be obtained within this world. Parel makes it clear that from this notion of civilisation emerges the concept of *sarvodaya*, service, duty and welfare for all and, I add, that it clarifies the civilisational democratic proposal advanced by Gandhi.

Western civilisation is criticised by Gandhi because it has lost its own moral and spiritual values by accentuating the centrality of wealth, power and passion.⁹¹ After Western supremacy, Parel (2003) defends that in Gandhi's view power became the meter of civilisational strength. In this view, the West conquered the world and classified on the power-scale based on violence and force. This is one application of the abyssal 'logic of social

⁹¹ Gandhi's civilisational view and invitation to reconnect Western politics with its moral and spiritual roots resonates with Simone Weil's (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.

classification, based on the monoculture of the naturalization of differences’ (Santos 2014:173).

The criticism of technology and development is directed against the centrality of power and the alienation of the other sphere of life. Gandhi engages in Hindu – Muslim dialogue, advocated for religious plurality in his civilisational open spirituality and opposed *hindutva* based on social classification and centred on power and wealth coupled with violence and social fascism. Later, I analyse how within this view of intra-civilisational dialogue Gandhi had to oppose another front, that being the one of the Untouchables guided by Ambedkar. In sum, Parel (2003) defends that Gandhi’s civilisational proposal is based on the Hindu’s worldview, is combined with Western humanism (based on human rights, state secularism, equality, civic nationalism) and his opposition was towards the excess centrality of *artha* and *kama*, or the loss of morality and spirituality.

Years after the publication of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi was simultaneously leading the struggle for independence and creating the base for a different democratic model for an independent India. This model focused on individual and community self-reliance, autonomy and government, and was thereby not centred on representation nor on strong state institutions. He did not work to build a cultural hegemony, but rather shaped a new peripheral democratic vision incompatible with state centralism (and its violence), which he considered to be a dehumanising and irresponsible organisation (Parekh 1989:28, 110–11). As Parekh describes ‘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). Gandhi proposed to think of democracy starting from the people and the community with a radical devolution and decentralisation of political power to the local dimension based on the trans-scale from the local to the national (Kumar 2004). Localisation of democratic practices is the first characteristic of Gandhi’s democracy, while community independence is the second by tracing a distance from the central (state’s) decision making. The community is auto-centred and advocates for the virtuous growth of individuals (through education and work).

Pantham (1983) suggests that Gandhi designed a post-capitalist society where real democracy (*purna swaraj* – complete for full self-rule) could be achieved in an ideal moral

state, ‘*Ramraj*’ or the state ruled by higher morality not by legal coercive power (see also Pandey 1988; Skaria 2011).⁹² The democratic and anti-colonial discourse merge in Gandhi’s work and this joint approach is not limited to the historical colonialism suffered under the British. Rather, for Gandhi, it extends to political-colonialism. In Gandhi’s holistic view, there is neither primacy of the political but rather, ‘independence should be political, economic and moral’ (H 5-5-1946). For Gandhi the risk to keep a political-colonial system resided in the mere aspiration to substitute one elite for another. He did not believe that the British ruler should be substituted by Indian counterparts, as otherwise it would amount to ‘English rule without the Englishman, [...] the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger; that is to say [...] make India English’ (Gandhi 1938 Chap. IV). For Gandhi, this implied that independent India would remain politically colonial with a Westernised Indian elite (Parekh 1989:113).

The democratic ideal by Gandhi goes beyond the political dimension as the Mahatma included all spheres of life in encapsulating the spiritual, and thereby going beyond the physical dimension. In doing so Gandhi demonstrated a progressive approach concerning liberal (Western) and conservative (Hindu) traditions.⁹³ While he struggled against Western political and cultural hegemony, he also opposed the hegemony of India’s own tradition and renovated their spirit in an intercultural and interreligious approach. While adopting an anti-Western rhetoric, he was also struggling for an alternative social order for India that was not based on caste and gender discrimination and indeed he gave an unprecedented contribution for the emancipation of women and the *Dalit* (see below).⁹⁴ The democratic model he

⁹² “‘*Swaraj*’ for Gandhi is just equivalent with “*Ramraj*” in which he argued that the moral authority and power are the basic foundations of the sovereignty of the people’ (Pandey 1988:41).

⁹³ The historian and linguist Ajay Skaria (2002) maintains that through a reading of Gandhi in both Gujarati and English it is possible to identify more clearly his critique both to liberalism and conservatism. Suhrud (2005) elaborates on the political use of language by Gandhi to show how his language choices had a political objective.

⁹⁴ In the next chapter section, I will elaborate on Gandhi’s position on untouchability and caste. A similar analysis would be necessary for the issue of gender and women empowerment with Gandhi, which is an equally controversial topic. Having no space for a detailed account of the topic here, I wish to mention that the literature is extremely vast, as in relation to many other areas of Gandhi’s thoughts and deeds, critical positions pertain to a very wide range of angles. Gandhi had a prominent role in the emancipation and empowerment of women in India. Howard (2013) elaborates on Gandhi’s effort for the emancipation of women from the practice of oppression rooted in social and religious traditions, showing how he coupled this struggle with the development of the *satyagraha* and moral force through celibacy. Patel (1988) and Symonds (1999) elaborated on Gandhi’s deeds to make women present and active in Indian politics and the independence movement. Srinivasan (1987) elaborates on the relationship between a vision of *swaraj* and the role of women to defend the civilisational unicity of Indian compared to modern civilisation, his role for and relations with women and his

proposed starts from the grassroots with the marginalised to create an all-encompassing inclusion, but not a national standardisation (something which is yet to be explored below).

The path of *swaraj* includes a sophisticated social, political and economic organisation in which the concept of the individual is opposite to that of the individual of modern liberalism.⁹⁵ Instead of affirming individual rights as the base of social action, Gandhi emphasized the primacy of individual duty to accomplish one's personal and communitarian duty. The individual would become their own master in the service of society and with respect to living in harmony in the community, with nature and God. The basic role of Gandhi's democratic idea is the moral agency of subjects (both the individual and the community) as opposed to the egoistic subjects whose basic rights need protection. As previously stated '[The] Gandhian conception of individual is fundamentally different from that of liberalism and it has a different implication for democracy because in liberalism democracy is the aggregative system of self-interested individuals' (K. P. Mishra 2012:206–7). The Gandhian democratic ideal departs from individual emancipation because it leads to social emancipatory democracy, where emancipated and self-less individuals give rise to Gandhi's democratic worldview. Leading by example, '[h]e tried to practice, seriously and systematically, a modern

effort for the emancipation and empowerment of women is very wide. Howard (2011) and Lal (2008) elaborate on the relationship between Gandhi and feminism and for a 'feminist intervention into the historiography of satyagraha in South Africa' see Mongia (2006). Hardiman (2003:94–122) maintains that Gandhi's effort for women empowerment is connected with a solid patriarchal view rooted in social traditions, while Mookerjee-Leonard (2010) analyses patriarchy in the last two years of Gandhi's life in relation to the violence generated by the partition of India and Pakistan, and she assesses the Congress' leadership failures to tackle violence against women. Concerning the most debated aspects of Gandhi and his relationships with women associates much discussion is ongoing, for one of the most recent and detailed accounts see Girja Kumar's (2006); Weber (2011) instead accounts for Gandhi's relations with western women. Among the scholars I interviewed in India, Vidya Jain maintained that Gandhi worked for the empowerment of women as the champion of *satyagraha* and non-violence and soul force as opposed to the brute force of man; after this view he brought women to struggle non-violently within Indian families and society against traditional forms of oppression. Anupam Mishra (interview) elaborated on Gandhi's vision on gender equality but different social roles for women and men and defended his social empowerment of the role of women without expecting from him to have gender visions that are popular today. Similarly, Tridip Suvrud (interview) maintained that many times Gandhi is criticised for not being as we expect him to be in the XXI century, this criticism is more consistent for him than for other Indian leaders such as Ambedkar and Tagore for instance. Suvrud reaffirmed that Gandhi brought women into public life, something unprecedented, but he also admits that he was a prisoner of his time, as other leading figures. For a civilisational understanding of Gandhi's 'feminisation' of politics as a non-violent and non-coward reaction to colonialism in order to liberate both the coloniser and the colonised see Nandy (1983:48–55).

⁹⁵ There is an extremely vast literature on Gandhi's vision on democracy and an accurate account of it deserves a separate effort. To explore Gandhi's vision of economy see especially the *Constructive Programme* (1945) and *Village Swaraj* (1962) while Gandhi's economist, J. C. Kumarappa elaborated on the *Economy of Permanence* (1948) and for analyses see (Dasgupta 2003; Ishii 2001).

religious politics that was more tolerant of difference and less tolerant of injustice than liberalism' (Skaria 2002:959). To overcome homogenising liberal secularism, Gandhi proposed a spiritual root for democracy, as he re-established the link between liberty and equality through fraternity, an actively and politically constructed fraternity that Skaria names 'neighbourliness' and which is the basis of his new concept of nationalism.

The struggle of Gandhi against colonialism and capitalism finds profound roots in this philosophy of civilisations that integrate nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives. Gandhi believed that people living in a civilisation see their life horizon framed by colonialism and capitalism and do not easily look beyond them, therefore Western people were looking at power and to conquer the world through capitalism: '[t]hey wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods' (Gandhi 1938 Chap. VII). Gandhi's civilisational nationalism and its intra- and inter- civilisational dialogue, engages with the British for them to reconcile their civilisation with their own morality and spirituality. He intends that coloniser and colonised could mutually support each other in this exercise.⁹⁶ Likewise, he does it with high caste Hindus and Muslims within Indian civilisation. This would lead to an inter-civilisational dialogue, benefitting both colonised emancipated and coloniser reconciled with true life, and thereby benefitting the world, as it would tackle the very idea of colonialism and capitalism (based on the centrality of wealth and power over morality and spirituality). In this kind of inter-civilisational dialogue, the defence of worldly welfare includes also the defence of ecologic, economic and social justice and the preservation of the planet and its inhabitants as a common objective of all civilisation.

Gandhi's nationalism is substantially different from liberal nationalism, as it is reconstructed in the *ashram*, through personal engagement, learning and experience of the 'politics of *ahimsa*', something which Skaria comments on in the concept of 'neighbourliness' (Skaria 2002:956ss). Gandhi's vision of the nation is characterised by extreme equality ('kinship of all life'), but without the pretention to create uniformity, but rather, on the basis

⁹⁶ The invitation of the Mahatma to the West to reconcile with its own moral and spiritual roots, the inter-civilisational and cosmopolitan vision aimed to protect life beyond individual worldly pursuit, and permeate the message of religious authorities such as pope Francis, see for instance his *Laudato Si'* Encyclical letter (Francis 2015).

of shared history or culture.⁹⁷ Gandhi rejected the nation as uniformity and adopted civilisation as the substitute political concept that is the unifying meaning of peoples that are inescapably declined in the plural. This is because the Indian civilisation is the recognition of the lack of historical uniformity - a single mono-cultural nation. The contrast between nation and civilisation was politicised in the anti-colonial struggle, as 'he preferred to speak of swadeshi spirit which captured the interrelated ideas of collective pride, ancestral loyalty, mutual responsibility and intellectual and moral openness' (Parekh 1989:194).

Neighbourliness was based on the assumption of the absolute difference among people, which could be overcome through the suffering (*tapasya*) characteristic of non-violence. Here, '[t]he tapasya of neighborliness differed depending on the kind of absolute difference being addressed: the equal was met with *mitrata* ("friendship"), the subordinate with *seva* ("service"), and the superior with *satyagraha* ("civil disobedience")' (Skaria 2002:957). While political-colonialism is characterised by the lack of personal engagement for the detriment of political moral (engagement with society is due to self-interest), which reduces the respect of wider society for the people, Gandhi's path was the opposite. In his path, personal moral engagement (based on the spiritual dimension) is the root for the alternative model of democracy that he proposed. Although the adoption of terms such as religion, religiosity and spirituality is open to controversial interpretations,⁹⁸ the Gandhian model of democracy is secular and spiritual at the same time, however, it is not theocratic nor conservative in the sense of any religion. His model is based on intercultural roots without

⁹⁷ This was also the reason that Gandhi opposed Jinnah and the Muslim league demanding the creation of Pakistan as a confessional state. Muslims maintained that they were a nation while Gandhi defended that India was not made of nations but that it was a cradle of ethnic and religious diversity that came to be integrated within the Indian civilisation (Parekh 1989:177–78).

⁹⁸ As an example, two Indian scholars currently working at universities in the United States, Ajay Skaria and Akeel Bilgrami, define Gandhi in contradictory terms but with a substantial unison of vision concerning his political views. Skaria maintains that Gandhi preaches a religious politics while Bilgrami advocates that Gandhi's vision is secular. I believe they are both right because they convene on the assumption that Gandhi substantiated his moral concept of democracy through spiritual (as opposed to materialist) foundations besides it being universally inclusive regardless of the religious faith of individuals, therefore secular in a sense. They also agree that Gandhi refused liberal secularism as the fundamental component of Western civilisation that relegates the spiritual dimension of life in the private sphere, therefore disqualifying the proper root of what Gandhi considers the democratic ideal, *swaraj* or self-rule. The next chapter section will explore this argument in more detail. Ramachandra Guha maintains that Gandhi built a secular nation and Nehru radicalised his effort after independence (Guha 2008:751).

falling-off of multicultural tolerance.⁹⁹ In order to better understand this intercultural perspective, the relations between individual and community are explored in the following section.

2.1.2 *Individual and community*

Santos advocates that the incompleteness and prejudice of possessive individualism must be recognised and transcended in order to reconcile the individual with the community. In this context ‘the right to self-determination must be given a new prominence’ (Santos 1995:351). Since Gandhi’s concept of democracy is precisely based on this ‘human right’, that is, the right to self-determination or *swaraj* in Gandhi’s terms, which in fact is a much broader concept with respect to a simple right. It is important to analyse the way Gandhi has actually challenged and overcome the philosophical and social implications of this notion of the individual in order to reconcile it with the community. The theory of ‘possessive individualism’ by C. B. Macpherson (1964a) is an excellent reference to help one understand the cultural shift contained in Gandhi’s political vision when compared to Western political thought. Moreover, it offers the possibility to explain the social structure envisaged by Gandhi as based on individual duty and community cooperation without the regulation of the market (see also Chimni 2012; Dasgupta 2003; Pandey 2014).

Although Gandhi maintains a moral-discursive justification in God (within his spiritual view of democracy), he does not substantiate a political theory of democracy on theocratic validations, nor does he exclude those who achieve political morality through a different secular path than his. On the contrary, to develop his proposal he adopted a rational concept of the human being who orientates their action towards a moral concept of truth (Bilgrami 2002). While for Gandhi ‘Truth is God’, the rationality inscribed in his democratic vision is anthropological, as a being oriented towards truth who *moves – voluntarily – towards* truth, and who is not *moved by truth*. Gandhi’s rational notion is not based on the individual as

⁹⁹ Tito Marci accounts for a deep notion of inclusion based on hospitality – as opposed to a functional exchange based on the individualistic liberal perspective ‘which relegate the solution of cultural, political, and social inclusion to the universalism of legal norms that are basically neutral compared to the various “private” ethical conceptions, without taking cultural diversity into account’ (Marci 2013:188). The inclusion is based on ‘the hospitality relation, whoever is offered hospitality remains invariably other with respect to the society that is nonetheless accepting him’ (Marci 2013:195). The acceptance of otherness as constitutional of the community is central for Gandhi as in that he overcomes the limits of tolerance and multiculturalism framed by liberalism.

proprietor of herself, nor in the property as a result of personal talent, but as the holder of those talents without being proprietor of the gains. She is a trustee of her own talents for the best sake of society:

Every individual must have the fullest liberty to use his talents consistently with equal use by neighbours, but no one is entitled to the arbitrary use of the gains from the talents. He is part of the nation or, say, the social structure surrounding him. Therefore, he can use his talents not for self only but for the social structure of which he is but a part and on whose sufferance he lives. The present inequalities are surely due to people's ignorance. With a growing knowledge of their natural strength, the inequalities must disappear (H 2-8-1942).¹⁰⁰

Dasgupta (2003:184) highlights the rigour of Gandhi's methodological individualism, the result of his theory and deeds being centred on the agency of the individual as the relevant unit of account. Dasgupta defines it as 'non-possessive individualism', however the insistence of Gandhi on 'non-possession' as both a spiritual and rational horizon of detachment – and therefore not merely a feature of the individual, suggests that 'non-possession individualism' is a more adequate term as this is the basic notion of Gandhi's political theory. That is to say, Gandhi's perspective changes both the ontological and epistemological concept of the individual, an individual that is not characterised by possession (ontology) in the measure that she opts to recognise her own profound value as freedom from attachment to worldly things and beings (epistemology). While Macpherson's definition was a descriptive one, this is a prescriptive one. They are both, however, equally philosophical speculations because the notion of non-possession individualism informs the democratic theory of Gandhi, as the notion of possessive individualism is structural in the understanding of Western liberal political thought as proposed by Macpherson.

The Western liberal political form, with its minimalist concept of the individual, for Gandhi was intrusive in that it defined what a good person should be, that is a good citizen, and it was reductionist because it reduced human essence from spiritual to political (Bilgrami 2009:48). Gandhi's perspective, as we shall see, is all but merely reduced to a utilitarian understanding of the economic or political. The democratic conception proposed by Gandhi

¹⁰⁰ These statements are extracted from an article in which Gandhi makes an appeal to Indian princes to voluntarily share their properties with the people, under his economic doctrine of 'trusteeship' which is based on the concept of non-possession (*aparigraha* in Sanskrit). For more insight on trusteeship see Dasgupta (2003:118–31). Non-possession was also one of the vows to be respected in Gandhi's communities living in his *ashrams*.

is an ethical perspective not restricted to the state, the public sphere or the social structure. The separation of the private and public spheres, along with that of the state and civil-society, is radically questioned by a vision that is all encompassing of the life in its personal, social, and ecological meanings. Ecology here, is understood in the broad sense of the epistemologies of the South (therefore not restricted to the environmentalist acceptance although it is included), as a structural openness towards the epistemological diversity of the world and the radicalisation of equality among different epistemologies (Santos 2014).

The Gandhian notion of the individual is formed in the framework of self-emancipation, the voluntary renunciation to possession as the root cause of personal and social order. While in the theory of possessive individualism there exists the centrality of rights, in the theory of non-possession individualism, there is a centrality of duty because it is in the service to the community that the individual finds her happiness:

[S]ervice in a spirit of detachment, which means complete independence of the fruit of action. [...] The human body is meant solely for service never for indulgence. [...] E]veryone has a right and should desire to live 125 years while performing service without an eye on result. Such a life must be wholly and solely dedicated to service (H 24-2-1946).

I would say that there is nothing like a right. For the one who has no duties there are no rights either. In other words, all rights emanate from duties-if there is no duty, there is no right either. When I do my duty, it brings some result and that is my right (Speech at prayer meeting 23 November 1947 – CWMG Vol. 90 p. 91).

Non-possession individualism is influenced by the complex intercultural theoretical background of Gandhi, which in this case includes primarily the Hindu religious concept of 'moksha', or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Gandhi however, upholds his political value on the basis of political not religious arguments (Parekh 1989:94–97). It is not at all contradictory that Gandhi contended that politics should strive for an unalienated, active and value based life which grounds a more democratic secular mentality with respect to the Western liberal tradition that, is based on the detachment and alienation of science leading to the subjugation of nature (Bilgrami 2006, 2009). Parekh underlines that 'detachment it did not mean indifference but absence of attachment, not lack of interest but of self-interest' (Parekh 1989:97) and that his order of thinking is part of a cosmic order searching for harmony with fellow humans, all living beings and the whole of creation.

As Bilgrami (2009) authoritatively demonstrated, the genealogy of the political individual in a spiritual (but not confessional) metaphysic centred on ‘Truth’ or ‘God’, is at the root of Gandhi’s political message which stands in blatant contrast with Western modernity. The cultural shift is rooted in the different relationship with nature, a relationship to not dominate but to live in a harmonious relationship in the world. From this follows Gandhi’s criticism towards the excesses of Western modernity, starting from its notion of development.¹⁰¹ The root of Gandhian non-possession individualism is epistemic, where the citizens are manipulated in their capacity to learn and get informed, and are turned towards their own illusionary interests, while, for Gandhi, the renunciation of those ephemeral possessions was the basis of individual freedom.¹⁰² Bilgrami contends that Western liberal political culture is built on the epistemic deficit of the people that is constructed institutionally and is constitutive of the political culture in its modern roots.¹⁰³ Gandhi, with his subverted concept of the individual, wanted to contradict this in an alternative and substantive democracy. In order to define the basic situation of inferiority of the individual in the liberal canon, Bilgrami refers to ‘epistemic weakness’ by which social and political structures direct and undermine (tracing it of inconstancy and therefore political inferiority), the political culture of the people:

These are weaknesses in the cognitive realm generated by a political and economic culture and institutions deriving from the metaphysical shifts that I had genealogically traced to the late 17th century, which in their entrenchment over the centuries ensures that ordinary people have the epistemic deficits I am stressing. It is the longstanding institutional causes of these deficits that should be the real target of our criticism and contempt, not the ordinary people who are its victims (Bilgrami 2009:56).

¹⁰¹ Bilgrami affirms states that ‘It is this exile of God, which had the effect of rendering the universe brute and inert, that implied the transformation of an ancient and spiritually informed conception of nature into the sort of thing that was available now for predatory extraction by commerce and the elites that grew around it’ (Bilgrami 2009:51).

¹⁰² Bilgrami states that ‘the First Law of Political Psychology that “One cannot exercise such moral strengths that one has, if one is pervasively epistemically weak”, weak on information, and information, not just in the narrow sense, though that is bad enough, but also in the broader sense of having easily available in one’s education and cognitive lives generally, alternative frameworks for thinking about politics, political economy, and public life’ (Bilgrami 2009:54).

¹⁰³ Bilgrami maintains that political liberalism was built on an elitist concept structured on the basic notion that people are subdued to an elite and it has been perpetrated up until the present day. ‘[T]he point is not just about media and information but much more broadly and pervasively about subtle forms of internalisation of pervasively orthodox and uncritical thinking on public matters from very early on in the mainstream educational institutions’ (Bilgrami 2009:54).

For Gandhi, the individual is the agent of the epistemic liberation that is not independent from social structures. Therefore, the concept of democracy combines the spiritual with the socio-political sphere, the individual within the community in a world regulated by gravitational moral constraints of which the appropriate knowledge and the diligent moral practice can emancipate.

2.1.3 State and swaraj

The struggle for India's independence from British colonialism was for Gandhi just part of a longer journey towards democracy, a utopian horizon that led to self-government or '*swaraj*' which included a different worldview.¹⁰⁴ Suhrud maintains that in the Indian political and social discourse *swaraj* has three overlapping meanings: 'home rule', 'independence' and 'freedom', however Gandhi gave the term the meaning of self-rule, or learning to rule oneself. 'He defined Swaraj thus: "It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves" [(Gandhi 1938 Chap. XIV)]. To rule one's self meant to have control over the mind and passions, to lead a moral, duty bound life' (Suhrud 2005:212–13). Suhrud continues that *swaraj* was not an event but a state of the individual who accepted the enslavement of the Western coloniser. For him, even before independence the Indian people could be free from the colonial oppression as after political independence they could remain enslaved by colonialism. Gandhi meant the independence and emancipation of the individual within the emancipation of the community. The horizon of utopia concretised in the Gandhian project to create a federation of 700.000 village republics in India.

Gandhi wanted to inaugurate a solid alternative to liberal representative democracy with a scalar level of political clusters (oceanic circle) centred on the: individual, village community, provincial, regional, state and the unity of the nation. Political parties for Gandhi contribute to the creation of elites, divide the state and society, undermine the participatory characteristic of politics and are completely useless in the one political dimension that is for Gandhi the most important – the local one (Jain 2009:42–46). Therefore, the role of political parties may stand in contradiction with the aim of democracy because it favours the creation of powerful political elites as opposed to the duty-oriented civil service that should

¹⁰⁴ Pantham (1983) identifies *swaraj* with participatory democracy.

characterise political activism. Gandhi wished for the dissolution of the Congress Party in favour of the creation of the *Lok Sevak Sangh* (Association for the Service of the People) that would establish the system of decentralised *panchayats* (the local democratic units). Leaders that are, either directly or indirectly elected by the people, would 'serve' both their country and their local areas, and they would derive their power from the service they provide (H 15-2-1948). Besides being supportive of universal suffrage at a time when this was not so obvious, he believed that at the lowest level of the democratic pyramid (which is the most relevant to him) political parties are not necessary at all (Jain 2009:42–46).

One of the main criticism directed towards Gandhi's vision of democracy is that it may well apply in small scale and rural areas but it is not appropriate for modern countries. Parekh clarifies this point as follows: '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. But his heart hankered after the simplicity of rural life and remained in tension with his head' (Parekh 2001:121–22). Parekh underestimates the utopian relevance of the project and tends to meld it in a realist reading that Gandhi had to make of the social and political context of India, especially after independence. While Parekh rightly understands that Gandhi came to increasingly recognise the role of the state after independence, he had never justified a Western type of state, and therefore Gandhi's vision did not eventually lead to the current political structure characterised by state centrality. Parekh argues that concerning the state Gandhi's theory lacked behind his practice which promoted a state with characteristics very close to the Western state (Parekh 1989:120). However, the utopian and realist views of Gandhi, if it is at all possible to distinguish them, should always consider that his opinion was continuously evolving (as Parekh partially concedes) and methodologically adapting towards a higher political goal (see also Parel 2011). In other words, a Manichean reading of Gandhi's argument on the state, as if he fully opposed it or eventually supported it, undermines the sophistication of Gandhi's argument and political activism, because as he mentioned several times, he was not preoccupied by being consistent, but rather with walking towards truth – which, in a sense, is fearlessly utopian in the political sphere. As a result, the utopian village-

republics system and a united modern state, in Gandhi's vision, were both concrete and theoretical devices to foster an idea of democracy alternative to the Western liberal model.¹⁰⁵ In such a vision, the state could be thought of in different forms with respect to the centralist, elitist-representative, procedural one, which is defended by the monopoly of violence as in the nature of states typical of political-colonial regimes.

Gandhi's vision of the state, to operate within the constraints of the existing democratic system forged by the Western model fostered the importance of public opinion and the self-consciousness of the people in order to extend popular sovereignty and reduce the power of the representatives. Detractors indicate that this form of small-community democracy would deliver a draconic and oppressive clan where spiritual freedom would be converted in paternalistic doctrines, such as the conditions of *khap panchayats*. Tridip Suhrud comments that this is not Gandhi's project:

I don't think Gandhi was saying, and I think that's where people make an error, that let's give power to non-democratic institutions. Now, caste panchayats or khap panchayats or traditional modes of governance – which are not necessarily based on principles of representative democracy – is not something he is advocating at all. What he is saying is that the idea of modern democracy, however you define it, [...] in which all people - women and men - irrespective of the class, irrespective of their education, irrespective of their caste background, should have a position of equality. Now, that goes against traditional models, so I don't think he is advocating a traditional model of the khap panchayat kind of the caste panchayat kind. [...] If you were to actually interpret Gandhian swaraj in terms of these traditional structures, I think one would create much greater violence towards both women as also Dalit community as also the Adivasi. Because these traditional forms have always been oppressive of these three groups (interview Tridip Suhrud).

Gandhi was extremely progressive in his conception of the community. He did not defend a sort of traditional closed enclave, something which is also demonstrated by the fact that he maintained that public opinion is the tool to reduce the abuses of democracy (Jain 2009:36). In addition, he was a strenuous defender of minority rights against the dictatorship of the democratic majority, regardless of the scale of the polity. He believed that the rule of the majority would not overrule the freedom of individual judgment as it contains the moral

¹⁰⁵ See an exchange between a foreign journalist and Gandhi (H 23-6-1946) in which the former pressed the latter with questions on his (considered) non-progressive vision of the future of India based on the villages. Gandhi maintained that India was primarily rural not urban, that the colonial system of the 'British have exploited India through their cities. The latter have exploited the villages.' Therefore the scale for Gandhi was directly linked with a non-colonial political system in which the cities 'should re-adjust their lives so as to cease to sponge upon poor village folk and make to the latter what reparation is possible even at this late hour by helping to resuscitate their ruined economy' (*ibidem*).

value upon which the democratic framework is built: '[d]emocracy is not a state in which people act like sheep. Under democracy, individual liberty of opinion and action is jealously guarded' (YI 3-2-1922).

Gandhi was a religious person but he was convinced that the state should be secular, meaning that there should be no interference of the state in the personal religious decisions of each individual. He believed that the religious path is an individual one to be freely shared with the community. All religions should be respected and protected in the same way (Jain 2009:47). However, being a religious person himself, Gandhi opposed an institutional religious vision for democracy, and rather proposed a secular concept of the community and of the state where all religions could peacefully flourish. Gandhi fought with all his capacity against religious or caste segregation and opposed the partition of India and Pakistan with a deep inter-religious and inter-cultural spirit.

Notwithstanding of Gandhi's utopian vision, his political thought and work were foundational of post-independence Indian polity. Dipankar Gupta advocates that Gandhi has been fundamental in the creation of a liberal and secular democratic India that has proved able to self-maintain itself when compared with the deterioration that has resulted in dictatorship or authoritarian regimes of other countries with a similar history (Gupta 2009, 2013:45–67; interview Dipankar Gupta). Gupta maintains that Gandhi's views on India's future have permeated the constitution and the cultural, social and political spheres in India, making it a modern and democratic country. Gandhi founded the modern Indian public sphere based on what Habermas would then develop to become known as communicative action, although it is not merely based on rationality and with a wider intercultural scope. Gupta points out how Gandhi goes beyond Habermas who maintained his communicative rationality based on a homogenising rationality (internal to a 'lifeworld') while for Gandhi, epistemological plurality (between 'lifeworlds') was a richness and unavoidable fact from which the democratic consensus can be established through non-violent means (Gupta 2009:29). Gupta explains that 'Gandhi provided the stage for people to openly confront diverse options regarding the role of women in public life, the place of capitalism in a developing country, caste relations, the importance of import substitution, and the significance of village life, of family relationships and of tradition in general' (Gupta 2009:31).

The analysis by Gupta proves extremely valuable in highlighting the fundamental role of Gandhi in the establishment of a democratic India, to manifest the 'modernity' of Gandhi and his political thinking against those affirming his parochialism, religious-bias, backwardness and marginality of world and Indian history. Gupta's analysis shows that Gandhi's thoughts and activism proved effective in the promotion of a liberal democratic regime, but it does not suggest that this was Gandhi's objective. Present works on Gandhi emphasize that his ideas and deeds were much more audacious and that they incorporated more of an ecological epistemological perspective (in the understanding of the epistemologies of the South) than a Western monoculture. The view of Gandhi as merely a liberal founder of modern India would be limited and misleading for two main reasons: first, it neglects the opposition that Gandhi had already manifested with regard to the establishment of a liberal state for India, based on a European-like public sphere. Second, his fellow freedom fighters dissented from him with respect to his political vision for what he considered a modern, secular, independent and emancipatory Indian state, as did India part from his view in his last years of life and after his assassination.

A few months after India's independence, in mid-December 1947, Gandhi was persistently preoccupied with community division and the loss of a democratic path towards *swaraj*. In a meeting of the constructive workers and education associations he insisted that social work should not seek to be represented within the governmental framework (CWMG Vol. 90 P. 215-224). Gandhi was deluded for the political venture undertaken by the Congress and India that, besides attaining political independence, failed the necessary constitutive intercultural and inter-religious relations between Muslims and Hindus and saw the formation of a political regime that was not alternative to those he criticised. Gandhi at this time seemed to maintain that non-violent India was an illusion that vanished with independence and while his own delusion was extremely bitter but not compliant, he encouraged constructive workers to continue to work in society with the same objective as before, although in a different political context. He believed that they should continue to operate in society, to raise social awareness of the importance of cultivating grassroots activities independently from the form

of the state and its constitution by political leaders.¹⁰⁶ He also stressed that constructive workers should not mingle in political activities, and should not let politics co-opt themselves. Confronted with the failure of his lifelong political aspiration, Gandhi gave us two fundamental lessons. The first, is that he did not abandon the struggle, on the contrary, he reinforced his commitment to renouncing political power and confirming his social commitment.¹⁰⁷ The second is that the democratisation process he advocated for was to be carried out with social engagement, regardless of the response of the institutions, as democratisation of democracy must be operated at the grassroots.

2.1.4 Ahimsa, satyagraha and ashram

Two concepts sustain the whole framework of Gandhi's thoughts and activism: '*sat*' or truth and '*ahimsa*' or non-violence. For Gandhi 'Truth is God' and therefore he believed that the superior goal of life was only achievable through the superior mean of non-violence. He devoted his entire life experimenting and disseminating the practice of non-violence to achieve truth – and thus, made evident the spiritual dimension of his own politics. In concluding his *An autobiography, or the Story of my experiments with truth*, Gandhi said: 'I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsa' (Gandhi 1927 Chap. 168). Never tired to reassert the indestructible unity of truth and non-violence, he also reasserted it for what concerns politics. A year before the end of colonialism in India, when questioned on the primacy of non-violence over truth in the path that led India at the edge of independence, Gandhi responded that he did not privilege *ahimsa*, but rather walking the path of non-violence leads to truth and that this is the only path towards the end.

¹⁰⁶ Rudolph and Rudolph stress the postmodern, contextual and radical value of Gandhi's Truth: 'Gandhi too rejected modernity's claims about absolutes and was "resolutely radical" in his commitment to transform the existing social order. Satyagrahis know "truth in action", not absolute truth, and are committed to radical social change' (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006:13).

¹⁰⁷ In these passages, Gandhi also maintains that through social service they will be able to influence the voter and have an indirect capacity to also influence electoral politics. Moreover, Gandhi maintained that he did not exclude that power could be held, for instance if such would be a popular request. 'By abjuring power and by devoting ourselves to pure and selfless service of the voters, we can guide and influence them. It would give us far more real power than we shall have by going into the Government. But a stage may come, when the people themselves may feel and say that they want us and no one else to wield the power. The question could then be considered' (CWMG Vol. 90 p. 223).

Ahimsa is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of ahimsa. A steadfast pursuit of ahimsa is inevitably bound to truth - not so violence. Truth came naturally to me. Ahimsa I acquired after struggle. But ahimsa being the means we are naturally more concerned with it in our everyday life. It is ahimsa, therefore, that our masses have to be educated in. Education in truth follows from it as a natural end (H 23-6-1946).

Ahimsa is an active force to fight for and defend human dignity, a renunciation of violence eradicating its root-causes, possession and passion. For Gandhi, non-violence is strictly linked with democracy, as he maintained that ‘democracy, so long as it is sustained by violence, cannot provide for or protect the weak. My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence’ (H 18-5-1940). Everyone can experience non-violence through training and by adopting it as a way of life that includes honesty, humility, kindness, tolerance, truthfulness, perseverance, courage, sacrifice and self-restraint. Whatever force comes from arms or violence relies upon an external source or instrument, while the force of non-violence relies in the true and infinite force coming from the soul and faith in the ultimate truth, God (H 19-11-1938).

Satyagraha is a term and a method that was coined by Gandhi. It is the method of practicing non-violence in politics. It is formed by two words meaning ‘truth’ (*satya*) and ‘firmness’, ‘desire’, ‘insistence’ or ‘determined pursuit’ (*agraha*) resulting in ‘firmness on truth’, ‘desire of truth’, ‘insistence on truth’ or ‘determined pursuit of truth’. While ‘Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills’ (H 28-2-1936), *satyagraha* as a spiritual, social and political philosophy was invented by Gandhi.

Gandhi himself used to render the concept of *satyagraha* with English translations such as ‘passive resistance’, ‘soul force’ or ‘love force’, although these translations did not reflect the richness of the original meaning.¹⁰⁸ He understood and experienced *satyagraha* as

¹⁰⁸ Apart from the term, both theory and practice of *satyagraha* emerged in South Africa which Gandhi wrote in the form of an article when he was incarcerated in Yerwada prison and then published as *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Gandhi 1950). In 1906 Gandhi announced a contest to identify an appropriate word to better denominate their struggle and Magahlal Gandhi won the competition with *sadagraha* meaning ‘firmness in a good cause’ (Gandhi 1927 Chap. 103), which he then finalised as *satyagraha*. Gandhi describes the reasons why the term ‘passive resistance’ was unfit for the growing experience of self and social purification and civil resistance of the Indians in South Africa. In the first place it was at times translated with the resistance of the ‘weak’, which is precisely the opposite of Mahatma’s thought and discipline of non-violence as the highest force, or soul force. Secondly, passive resistance could still accept recourse to violence as a means of struggle, which was unacceptable to Gandhi (see also Suhrud 2005:310–12).

a superior force, a force that was much more acute and complex than physical force or ‘brute force’. *Satyagrahis* abstain from inflicting violence and practice self-suffering as a method of struggle. They aim to persuade – or ‘convert’ – the adversary about the unacceptability of a principle of moral importance. *Satyagraha* is not the renunciation of violence because of personal or societal weakness, but it is the adoption of non-violence as a courageous action to use pure means (non-violence) in order to achieve the superior end (truth). *Satyagraha* served the individual through self-realisation, the community through civil disobedience and constructive work, and the cosmic order in whole. It is the foundational practice that was adopted both as a form of struggle and social reform that serves the purpose of *sarvodaya* or welfare of all (progress of uplift of all).

As a method of civil disobedience,¹⁰⁹ *satyagraha* is a struggle without malice, revenge, or the will to harm. It is aimed at the conversion of the heart of the adversary through self-suffering. *Satyagraha* underlies the recognition of the inner power of the individual opposed by oppression and injustice. *Realising this power, Satyagraha* opposes resistance, without fear or passiveness, until the oppression can no longer endure. Basic conditions for the practitioner, the *satyagrahi*, include: no hatred for the opponent, struggle for a true and substantial issue, resistance against offensive and violent acts without reacting and accepting the consequence of infracting a law. A *satyagrahi* continues to be open to dialogue and compromise in honourable terms, is very critical of herself and her own mistakes and is very

¹⁰⁹ *Satyagraha* may adopt different direct actions such as fast, march, open a breach of a law, *hartal* or strike, non-cooperation, boycott and other forms of resistance. Being a spiritual enterprise, *satyagraha* accepts compromise in dignifying terms but does not seek exception, for instance, Gandhi avoided the engagement of women in the salt march because he knew the British would treat them with respect due to cultural reasons, and he believed that the involvement of woman would be a coward strategy in that context. After the invention and training of *satyagraha* in South Africa, Gandhi adopted it in India to approach local, social and political problems, for instance, about unjust working relationships leading to poverty and famine (in Champaran, 1916) and unfair rise of taxation in times of famine (in Kheda, 1918). The more struggles Gandhi took up, the more his method and leadership became effective and renowned. At the beginning of the 1920s he challenged the Rowlatt Act, a British decision to prolong the restrictions to civil liberties applied in India during World War I. In this period, Gandhi worked to fortify a different economic model through the concept of *swadeshi* – centred on the use of national products as opposed to those imported by the coloniser – through the self-production of *khadi* (cotton hand-made local cloth) and the adoption of it as a national symbol (it still is). The campaign implied a thorough boycott of the colonisers by stopping working for them and using their imported products. It was also a moment to strengthen Indian culture and patriotism, reasons that fortified the boycott against Western products and Western culture. India would achieve independence only a quarter of a century later but the capacity of the *Mahatma* to achieve it through *satyagraha* was increasing. The ‘Quit India’ movement (1942) was the last step towards national independence as it mobilised the whole country and urged the British to pave the way to independence.

open and gentle towards the mistakes of the opponent.¹¹⁰ The struggle of the *satyagrahi* may take very long but Gandhi maintained that if held with courage there is no possible defeat for *Satyagraha* (H 18-8-1946). It assumes that the emancipation of the (politically) oppressed becomes possible when one rejects to comply with the rule of the oppressor by reactionary political actions (Parekh 1989:155–56), therefore abandoning ‘voluntary servitude’ (Boétie 2011).¹¹¹ Gandhi’s *satyagraha* favours a pragmatic outcome, as it is based on respect for the dignity of all parties in the struggle and therefore makes it possible to establish serene relations among them after the struggle. Winning the opponent does not entail her destruction but conversion. Conversion is towards truth, not a situated partiality, but an evidence related to the dignity of the parties and superior to the partial interests of the struggling fronts and therefore intelligible and reachable by both. Gandhi non-violently armed a mass movement. Non-violence was both the key to mobilise the whole population (as opposed to leaving the political initiative only to the elite) to grant political stability in a perspective independence and to build a political system autonomous from the one of the colonisers (Bilgrami 2002:81). Gandhi’s political message is based on the conscience of the indefatigable struggle against the political subjugation of the people by the hegemony of the political establishment.

Satyagraha was the method to achieve active participation in Indian society and therefore the method to achieve the social reforms that would lead India to a ‘Gandhian Democratisation’.¹¹² Gandhi developed the constructive programme (Gandhi 1945) to focus *satyagraha*’s force for the democratisation and development of Indian society, especially the

¹¹⁰ Murti (1968) provides an account of the historical challenges brought to Gandhi’s *satyagraha* by the philosopher of Dialogue, Martin Buber, who stated the limits of applicability of *satyagraha* in the case of Jews under Nazi German and in Palestine before the foundation of Israel.

¹¹¹ Skaria analyses *Hind Swaraj* to understand Gandhi’s criticism of modernity from a progressive perspective on the *swa* or proper, ‘it breaks with the modern tradition of conceptualising domination as the taking away of power and agency, and of conceptualising resistance as the recovery of agency. Instead, it questions domination by insisting on a subaltern responsibility for subordination. Here, subordination is thought not as the loss of power but as the loss of the *swa*. A politics of resistance, such as that involved in *satyagraha*, attempts to redress this loss by staying in a constitutive separation, and by giving this separation also to the dominant’ (Skaria 2007:222). The root of protest and political opposition is therefore centred in self-conversion as opposed to the conversion of the opponent, which should follow.

¹¹² Both as civil disobedience and social reform, Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* implies that the space of the political shall not be restricted to the institutional space devoted to oppositional thinking but shall go beyond the public sphere expanding the political space to pervade social life more widely.

rural villages which were the underdogs of the social structure. The constructive programme included 18 points that are meant to strengthen social bonds for community unity, and uplift Untouchables and women. The programme also touches upon moral, economic, sanitary and educational objectives. Parekh describes the four major political values of the constructive programme:

First, for the first time during the struggle for independence, Indians were provided with a clear, albeit limited, statement of social and economic objectives. Second, they were specific and within the range of every one of them. In a country long accustomed to finding plausible alibis for inaction, Gandhi's highly practical programme had the great merit of ruling out all excuses. Third, his constant emphasis on it reminded the country that political independence had no meaning without comprehensive national regeneration, and that all political power was ultimately derived from a united and disciplined people. Finally, the Constructive Programme enabled Gandhi to build up a dedicated group of grass-roots workers capable of mobilising the masses (Parekh 1989:63).

Considering that constructive work was the basis for the construction of a Gandhian society, we see that politics within institutions and politics outside of institutions, for Gandhi, are both characterised by the philosophy of *satyagraha* and for the achievement of *swaraj* – or democracy. Gandhi's non-violence was articulated to go beyond liberal constitutionalism, to struggle against the liberal pillar of the liberal representative colonial regime and to achieve an extra-constitutional (therefore more democratic) achievement (Bilgrami 2002:80). Gandhi maintained the need for the constructive programme after independence. For example, on the 13th November in 1947 he affirmed: '[w]e had recognized the need for constructive work when we were slaves. We will need it many times more to transform *swaraj* into *surajya* [good governance/state]' (CWMG Vol. 90 p. 24).

Gandhi, the socio-political strategist, did not merely launch a call to the population with his constructive programme. He adopted experimentalism as a methodological constitutive process. He experienced in the first person the precepts that he divulged for others to follow and created 'constructive' communities where the social and political practices were experimented with before being propagated around the country.¹¹³ The

¹¹³ Gandhi's experimentalism is extremely innovative for the kind of morality that it generates. Bilgrami defends the universal appeal of Gandhi's moral not based on universal principles but based on exemplary personal conscience and absence of moral judgement of others. For Gandhi, the moral example is higher than the moral principle, moral principles imply to impose those principles to others and then judge them accordingly, while moral examples are acceptable by others thought their own conscience. Bilgrami affirms that '[o]ne is fully confident in the choices one wants to set up as exemplars, and in the moral values they exemplify. On the other

ashram was the community based collective in which the Mahatma lived and worked. Its life was regulated by a moral code leading to self-restraint from worldly possession and satisfaction.¹¹⁴ His first experiences occurred in South Africa at the Phoenix and Tolstoy farm, and in two other places after returning to India. These were Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), where he spent 15 years and is the place he departed from with 79 fellow ashramites for the famous Salt march of 1930, and Sevagram (close to Wardha, Maharashtra, central India).

Gandhi convened individuals and, most importantly, families of different castes, religions, languages and regions of the country. The *ashram* provided an equal space for men and women in order to reinforce the role of women in Indian society and public life. They were also places of inter-religious and inter-caste living, and contributed to the struggle against communalism and caste oppression. Ashrams were laboratories of commitment to independence, dispute resolution, and religious, economic, social and political development.

Gandhi's ashrams were the training centres for Indian *satyagrahis* to experience and practice *satyagraha* at a personal level (self-experience) before joining collective campaigns. Collective campaigns, as mentioned earlier, included civil resistance *satyagrahas* but also the social constructive programme. With the *ashram*, Gandhi shows that the concept of the state, the duality with civil society, and the rigid division of the public and the private spheres can be questioned to favour the realisation of what Santos names 'high intensity democracy'.

hand, because no principle is generated, the conviction and confidence in one's opinions does not arrogate, it puts us in no position to be critical of others because there is no generality in their truth, of which others may fall afoul. Others may not follow' (Bilgrami 2002:86). The scale of the community has a direct impact on the effectiveness of Gandhi's morality because moral example are more visible in smaller communities, therefore the political constituency should be small to be moral (Bilgrami 2002:88). Truth is not a cognitive but a moral notion: 'Only if truth is so conceived can science become the paradigmatic pursuit of our culture, without it the scientific outlook lacks its deepest theoretical source. And it is a mark of his intellectual ambition that by making it an exclusively and exhaustively moral and experiential notion instead, Gandhi was attempting to repudiate the paradigm at the deepest possible conceptual level' (Bilgrami 2002:89).

¹¹⁴ *Ashramites* had to respect a number of vows that regulated the individual moral conduct (Gandhi 1932, 1959), they touched upon: truth, non-violence, *Brahmacharya* (sexual abstinence and control of all senses in Gandhi's acceptance), non-stealing (broadly implying restrains from desire), non-possession (poverty and self-restrain), bread labour (social service and working for a living, non-accumulation), control of the palate (separated from other senses because the more complicated to control), courage or fearlessness, inter-religious equality, *swadeshi* (use of local product and care for the community), and removal of untouchability (inter-caste living).

More importantly, Gandhi emphasises ‘high intensity political practices’ which characterise the intensity level of the democratic structure that they instil.

Gandhi’s alternative for India was based on a political, social and moral proposal for Indian peoples and cultures, and therefore civilisation, as it was more than for just India as a political and geopolitical ‘nation’. This is one of the root causes that led to the discredit of Gandhi’s theories with respect to India’s future, as ‘Gandhi came to believe that ashrams patterned on his ideals should primarily serve a pedagogical function by tackling the problems of the villagers, showing them the way to develop self-confidence and thus self-reliance, and training children and adults alike to be community workers without alienating them from their own people’ (Thomson 1993:296).

The ashram’s were places to reform society through deep engagement in another economy and another education. The emancipation of the individual and her subsequent availability for making social contributions is of central importance. A new educational model must therefore achieve a training through which practical work is valued and frees the subject from any source of servitude (domination from outside and artificial needs) and which educates for ‘real life’ (H 10-3-1946 and H 2-2-1947). In ‘*nai talim*’ (or *nayee talim*) – Gandhi’s education scheme – practical education combined with literary and spiritual education should result in the education of the person as an independent and freely cooperative member of the democratic polity. This is the model he practiced in his *Ashrams*.¹¹⁵ The final stage is ‘university education [whose aim] should be to turn out true servants of the people who will live and die for the country’s freedom’ (H 25-8-1946). The political and civic value of education invokes a wide conception of freedom that embraces freedom from political-colonialism: ‘[a]gitation is only for those who have completed their studies. While studying, the only occupation of students must be to increase their knowledge... All education in a country has got to be demonstrably in promotion of the progress of the country in which it is given’ (H 7-9-1947).

¹¹⁵ The new educational model starts at the local level, in the community where there are the conditions for ‘abolishing 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.

2.2 Annihilation of caste and Indian civilisational democracy

2.2.1 A Mahatma or an average racist man?

There is a new wave of confrontation between literature attacking Gandhi and literature defending him. Criticisms attempt to undermine Gandhi's historical figure by pointing out Gandhi's failure as a family person, his stubborn personality, his discriminatory attitude towards the natives of South Africa, his vision on caste and his sexual abstention experiment towards the end of his life (Adams 2010; Desai and Vahed 2016; Kumar 2006; Roy 2014).¹¹⁶ In this section, I will concentrate on the caste debate because it is both controversial and unavoidable to enhance a vision of democracy that is emerging in India. To some extent, it incorporates Gandhi's democratic view also concerning other criticism towards his thoughts and deeds. However, before doing so, and without pretending to be exhaustive, I will briefly confront the criticism concerning his alleged racism during his time in South Africa.

The accusations of racism against African natives are among the most instrumental criticisms against Gandhi in recent years. These relate to the time in which he was a young lawyer preoccupied with his social status and he cured his public image by dressing as a Western barrister, travelling in first class and living in comfortable houses.¹¹⁷ Gandhi's living

¹¹⁶ There are a plurality of intellectual and political interests behind these criticisms, substantiated by different arguments, which, in general, neglect or intentionally hide the complexity of the overall picture. Understanding Gandhi implies considering his whole life and not extrapolating a segment of it to make the overall judgment of the man. Gandhi spent his life in search of spiritual and physical self-improvement and his innate experimental method marks his living metamorphosis. Gandhi's deeds and attitudes at a younger age are insufficient to meter the person that would become 'the great soul'. Moreover the 'Mahatma', although one expected him to be a perfect 'Saint' (see the response to such claims by the grandson of the Mahatma, Rajmohan R. Gandhi 2015a), accommodating the immediate and long term needs of everybody, he held situated opinions and proposed a civilisational perspective that was questioned by opponents (on caste especially Ambedkar as we will see). Gandhi is therefore criticised because he was inconsistent as a 'Saint', but I believe that such inconsistency is highly reduced by looking at it in the civilisational perspective in which it took place (see also Nauriya 2016a). For instance, his spiritual and social leadership and family membership are inversely related, as the more responsibility he gathered as community leader, the more he considered the world as his family. He treated his sons as other people living in the *ashrams*, avoiding preferentialism, and this caused misunderstandings and unease in his own family. Kasturba had to struggle with him in many occasions and it was Gandhi himself who admitted to have learned *satyagraha* from her (H 24-12-1938). The adoption of celibacy (*brahmacharya*) at the age of 37 was a unilateral decision by Gandhi which Kasturba accepted without comment along with many other decisions of her husband. The more Gandhi intensified his spiritual life and increased self-restraint from passions and possession, the more a 'Saint' he became, the more he distanced himself from the traditional role of family man to embrace his universal responsibility.

¹¹⁷ These allegations generally take a few sentences of Gandhi from the end of the XIX or beginning of the XX century and read them in the emancipatory language of the XXI century. To judge him racist in this kind of analysis is a myopia that does not serve the cause of anti-racism. On the contrary, it rather strengthens the colonial enterprise by diminishing one of the most courageous and sophisticated of its adversaries. Initially,

style reflects his inner change towards what made him famous. Shortly after his arrival in South Africa, he gained the confidence of the Indian community to defend their civil rights, as this is what he focused on as a social activist. He did not escape the racial prejudice imposed by the colonial system, as he suffered as a 'coolie', a pejorative term for Indians who were classified as being between the Europeans and the natives on the racial scale. He was an ontological and epistemological victim of racism.

He began to struggle for the ontological emancipation of the Indians in South Africa but not of the natives of South Africa. Over the years he experienced the maturation of the epistemological conscience that made him a champion of the struggle against colonialism, racism, capitalism, communal radicalism and patriarchy. In order to defend the right of the Indians in South Africa, he tended to differentiate them from the natives and claim equality with the British. This was a form of accepting the racist classification in order to defend the intermediate position of the Indians in South Africa, as such, deployed an instrumental use of race. His targets of social emancipation were limited, and he struggled for some rights and against some repressive legislation but could not claim full citizenship although he tried to show that Indians deserved it.

The relation to the natives characterised by the relationship and events, is a story of initial indifference that was much informed by the racial segregation. While definitely being controversial, especially when analysing separate acts out of their context, it must be noted that his views changed along the two decades he spent in the colony. Before leaving South Africa, he had acquired a sympathy for the African natives that he supported and encouraged to seek their own emancipation. He later became an icon of the African National Congress (Kolge 2014, 2016a, 2016b, Nauriya 2012, 2015, 2016b).

2.2.2 Introducing the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate on caste

Dr. Bhim Rao (or Babasaheb) Ambedkar, was an Indian freedom fighter that rose up from the bottom of Indian society and caste as an Untouchable¹¹⁸ subhuman and worked his

Gandhi struggled within a racial system but not yet against the system itself. *Hind Swaraj* (1909) marks the epistemological rupture with the system. In the evolutionary understanding, fractures such as *Hind Swaraj* or the Poona act (1932) are paramount to verify the evolution of his views.

¹¹⁸ Untouchables are the outcastes or *Ati-Shudra* in the Hindu religion, they are those not belonging to the four *varnas* and are located below them in the social hierarchy. The British administration created an

way to study at university of Bombay, Columbia University in the USA (where he worked with John Dewey) and the London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK, among others. Ambedkar become the first law minister of independent India and the chairperson of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution.¹¹⁹ Gandhi internationally has been highly popularised by the Oscar winning film by Richard Attenborough entitled *Gandhi* (1982) winner of eight academy awards. The film, however, among other criticisms, does not mention Ambedkar at all. The film *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, by Jabbar Patel (2000), fails to do justice to Gandhi, as it paints a severe and disputable picture of him. Regardless of the power of images and the absences that they create, it is undisputable that Gandhi and Ambedkar have been the two leading figures that have dealt with the emancipation of *Dalits* during and after the freedom struggle in India. Their dispute is fundamental for a contemporary understanding of the abyssal rationality of the caste system and of the challenges raised by different approaches towards their emancipation.¹²⁰ In this section, I compare the thoughts of Ambedkar to those of Gandhi without the pretention to assert a rightness or wrongness to the positions. Rather, I attempt to consider the different reasons that moved these positions and I base my analysis of the two positioned angles and worldviews. I aim at understanding the connection between Gandhi's view on untouchability, caste and the *varna* system through his democratic perspective. Ambedkar was an 'Untouchable' by birth, (*Mahars* caste) while Gandhi belonged to the third *varna*, the *Vaishyas* or traders (*Bania* caste), but he claimed to

administrative subjectivity called 'Depressed Classes' grouping Untouchables and indigenous peoples. Gandhi defined Untouchables *Harijan* or 'People of God' or 'Children of God', while the term *Dalit* (Marathi word meaning oppressed or broken, crushed, ripped (Panikkar 1995:95)) was adopted later by Untouchable communities who are also defined Scheduled Castes (SC) as an administrative category. In the text, I make use of these terms interchangeably and with an ahistorical approach with regards to the use made by the authors.

¹¹⁹ Although there is controversy on the relevance that was played by Gandhi in getting Ambedkar assigned to the ministry and as chairpersonship (R. Gandhi 2015a, 2015b; Roy 2015), *Dalit* leaders of the Centre for Dalit Rights (Jaipur) P L. Mimroth and Satish Kumar (interview) have no doubt conceding that. The two leaders maintain that with Ambedkar's work for the Indian Constitution for the first time in history the issue of Untouchability become a state affair.

¹²⁰ The British somehow arbitrarily lumped the various Untouchable sub-castes existing in India into the same social group of the Depressed Classes and since 1909, 'Untouchables'. Similarly they did this with indigenous people that fall under Hindu categories (as opposed to other religions or minorities). The empire expected these groups to have a self-representation (Hardiman 2003:123–24). The debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi starts precisely from this claim, both pretending to represent Untouchables.

be an Untouchable by choice, something he told Ambedkar in one of their meetings (interview Narayan Desai II).¹²¹

The basic difference between the two great leaders is strictly informed by the interplay and priority of the struggles against colonialism and capitalism and must be framed in the wider context of the struggle against imperialism and a peculiar form of internal colonialism. Ambedkar's first objective was the emancipation of the Untouchables and his main enemy were high caste Hindus. Gandhi struggled simultaneously on more fronts, including with the British, high caste Hindus (although this is disputed as we will see), Muslim separatist and the Untouchables (with leaders such as Ambedkar). Gandhi especially tackled untouchability against the British and their imperialism, which used the fragmentation of communities (including minorities) to segregate and undermine the nationalist struggle.

Towards the end of his life, in August 1945, Gandhi restated that he rejected the destruction of Hinduism by Ambedkar and looked forward to a different society (CWMG Vol. 81 p. 220). A year later he stressed that a separate electorate for Untouchables is a demand against his nationalist project because it will divide the community (CWMG Vol. 85 pp. 18-22).¹²² In such a context, religion and democracy showed an undisputable reciprocity, as they were intermingled in the social and economic stratification of Indian society that goes beyond

¹²¹ Since the age of twelve Gandhi rejected the notion and practice of untouchability (Desai 1999:121–33). Also the relation with his caste was soon compromised. In his autobiography, Gandhi tells that his caste had objected at his decision to go to England for studying and that upon his insistence the head of the Bombay section out casted him. Gandhi writes: 'This incensed the Sheth. He swore at me. I sat unmoved. So the Sheth pronounced his order: "This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas" ' (Gandhi 1927 Chap. 13). Besides his innate aversion to untouchability, Drèze (interview), Roy (interview) and others maintain that some of his contemporaries such as Ambedkar had a much more progressive vision of the caste system as an overall system of oppression. I argue here that besides the development of Gandhi's position along the course of his life, it is also incorporated in his civilisational democratic approach.

¹²² This is the main reason why Gandhi was against a separate electorate for Untouchables and against the recognition of the Untouchables as a minority. He held this position until the end of his life and this was one of the main fracturing points with Ambedkar. In 1946 he affirmed that separate electorates 'must go even to the extent that exit today. They are a device of Satan named Imperialism. It was never meant for the protection of the Untouchables. It was prop of Imperialism. Every statutory separation has been in furtherance of the policy of "divide and rule". It is inherent in the life of imperialism even if it were to be called by a sweeter name'. Desai (1999:126) underlines that differently from the Muslims, mainly living in north-west and north-east parts of India, the 'Harijans were scattered throughout India, but hardly formed a majority in any part of India.' A separate electorate would create tensions for them and within the country, 'would destroy the "untouchable", the "unknown" and the "invisible" people in the far off corner of villages', finally it undermined the cohesion of Hindus.

Hinduism, as the castes also embrace those people that converted to other religions. Panikkar (1995:130–32) advocates a non-dualistic vision between religion and politics, something clearly present with Gandhi.

In this disputed context, different visions of emancipation and progress for India emerged. Ambedkar's position advocated political liberalism and urban industrialisation in order to have his community recognised as an oppressed minority and to tackle the caste system as a discriminatory regime. The romanticism of rural life is opposed by him.¹²³

Gandhi saw the future of India as the world champion, or world example, of a system of social organisation that is superior to and able to win against capitalism and colonialism. That is, it would achieve a social organisation much different from market society and its possessive individualism, and therefore based on *varnas* as a system of professional stratification.¹²⁴ Gandhi related eradication of untouchability with the eradication of hierarchy between different castes and the integration of all Indians in the *varna* system. To put it simply, Gandhi, up until the last few years of his life, thought that it would be possible to eradicate untouchability maintaining the *varna* system (but not the caste system),¹²⁵ while

¹²³ Sharit Bhowmik (interview) maintains that in Ambedkar's view there could be no democracy in rural areas because caste discrimination is more intense in rural areas. Confronted with this view, *Dalits* should emigrate to urban areas where they can have better water, working conditions and education. Bhowmik maintains that 'educate, organise, agitate' were the three words used by Ambedkar who advocated an urbanisation similar to the one that occurred in Europe as a consequence of the industrial revolution which destroyed the job-based discrimination of the mediaeval ages and created working class conscience. Indian Muslims represent for Bhowmik a progress in this direction, where *Dalits* have easier and better living conditions and access to education with respect to villages.

¹²⁴ The Gandhian activist Ram Chandra Rahi (interview) clarifies the difference between market society and the *varna* system society with the polarisation of the market (based on human weaknesses) and a living society (based on the virtues). The former is characterised by professionalism, alienation, and abuse of knowledge to produce market value. For example, epidemics may be exploited to produce and sell remedies, likewise in other areas where the replication of an evil or unjust situation produces market benefit. The latter is characterised by social servants.

¹²⁵ In the debate about the caste system it is fundamental to distinguish between the caste system and the *varna* (meaning colour or hue of human beings, simplified as groups) system, or the *varnashrama* (*ashrama/ashram* means hermitage or stage of life) or *chaturvarnya/chaturvarna* (*chatur* means four) *dharma* (moral law) which divides Hindus into four *varnas*: *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (soldiers), *Vaishyas* (traders) and *Shudras* (servants). The caste system emerged over time from the *varna* division as a sub division of norms and sub-castes amounting to around four thousand, and a group of outcastes named Untouchables that are traditionally radically segregated from caste Hindus and treated as nonhuman in several ways. Roy (Roy 2014:24–25) writes: 'In addition to being forced to live in segregated settlements, Untouchables were not allowed to use the public roads that privileged castes used, they were not allowed to drink from common wells, they were not allowed into Hindu temples, they were not allowed into privileged-caste schools, they were not permitted to cover their upper bodies, they were only allowed to wear certain kinds of clothes and certain kinds of jewellery.'

Ambedkar was convinced that it was not possible to eradicate untouchability without tackling the caste system, and therefore also the *varnas* or *Chaturvarna* or the *Varnashrama dharma*. He maintained that ‘as a system of social organisation, chaturvarnya is impracticable, is harmful, and has turned out to be a miserable failure’ (Ambedkar 2014 #16.1).¹²⁶

2.2.3 Ambedkar’s radical approach

Addressing high caste Hindu reformers, Ambedkar maintained: ‘You are right in holding that caste will cease to be an operative force only when inter-dining and intermarriage have become matters of common course. You have located the source of the disease’ (Ambedkar 2014 #20.6). However, he differed from Gandhi who worked for the ‘conversion’ or self-purification of caste Hindu and Untouchables against untouchability, including with an increased consideration for inter caste marriages. Ambedkar was convinced that the problem of caste discrimination did not stand with the people but stood with the caste system itself and the religious system of norms.¹²⁷ He had no expectation that a system change would take

Some castes, like the Mahars, the caste to which Ambedkar belonged, had to tie brooms to their waists to sweep away their polluted footprints, others had to hang spittoons around their necks to collect their polluted saliva. Men of the privileged castes had undisputed rights over the bodies of Untouchable women. Love is polluting. Rape is pure. In many parts of India, much of this continues to this day.’ On the rule of high caste Hindu and the implication of Hindu social order in Indian sociology see (Kumar 2016), who refers also to the mis-connection between the *varnas* and the colour of their skin.

¹²⁶ For Ambedkar the *Chaturvarnya* (based on worth – the four *varnas*) was impracticable because it was substantiated by the caste system (based on birth – around four thousand castes). ‘How are you going to reduce the four thousand castes, based on birth, to the four *varnas*, based on worth? This is the first difficulty which the protagonists of chaturvarnya must grapple with’ (Ambedkar 2014 #16.2). The worth is related to the value of each individual, ‘his own effort’ while the two conditions of birth are for Ambedkar physical hereditary and ‘social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage’ (Ambedkar 2014 #14.5). Ambedkar also disputes the connection of the four *varnas* with birth because of the symbolic association of the *varnas* with the social classification related to them that reinforces the value of birth over the liberty of the individual. ‘So long as these names continue, Hindus will continue to think of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra as hierarchical divisions of high and low, based on birth, and to act accordingly. The Hindu must be made to unlearn all this’ (Ambedkar 2014 #15.4). Finally, Ambedkar adopts the point of view of Western modernity individualism to assert that ‘Modern science has shown that the lumping together of individuals into a few sharply marked-off classes is a superficial view of man, not worthy of serious consideration’ (Ambedkar 2014 #16.5). He also maintains ‘that in practice the relation was that of master and servants. The three classes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, although not very happy in their mutual relationship, managed to work by compromise. The Brahmin flattered the Kshatriya, and both let the Vaishya live in order to be able to live upon him. But the three agreed to beat down the Shudra’ (Ambedkar 2014 #17.4).

¹²⁷ Ambedkar writes: ‘Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe caste, but the *shastras* which teach them this religion of caste’ (Ambedkar 2014 #20.9).

place as a self-exercise or due to a voluntary aptitude of the higher castes.¹²⁸ He was sceptical of the candour of social reforms originating among high caste Hindus and was convinced that there would be no genuine change in a system led by the high castes.

Ambedkar's solution to eradicate untouchability was the 'annihilation of caste', that implied to 'destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested. In the last analysis, this means you must destroy the authority of the Shastras and the Vedas' (Ambedkar 2014 #21.3). Due to the arrangement of social power, annihilation of caste for Ambedkar was an impossible task because the Brahmins, which Ambedkar identifies with the intellectual class of the Hindus, would not undertake it in order to not undermine their social privileges. Moreover, the hierarchical arrangement of castes made it impossible to ally castes in the struggle against the caste system and, finally, the use of reason against the sacred scripture (and their interpretations) is impossible for Hindus. For Ambedkar, Hinduism is characterised by rules and not by value, therefore it must be destroyed as a normative structure and substituted with a more equalitarian one:

[W]hat the Hindus call religion is really law, or at best legalised class-ethics. Frankly, I refuse to call this code of ordinances as religion. The first evil of such a code of ordinances, misrepresented to the people as religion, is that it tends to deprive moral life of freedom and spontaneity, and to reduce it (for the conscientious, at any rate) to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. Under it, there is no loyalty to ideals; there is only conformity to commands (Ambedkar 2014 #23.4).¹²⁹

Ambedkar's distance from Gandhi is reinforced by the priority given by the former to the elimination of social discrimination based on caste over political independence. While for

¹²⁸ Ambedkar highlights the mistaken attempt, including Gandhi's, to convert the conscience of people. 'Reformers working for the removal of untouchability, including Mahatma Gandhi, do not seem to realise that the acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated in their minds by the shastras, and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the shastras on which their conduct is founded' (Ambedkar 2014 #20.10).

¹²⁹ Besides speaking of the destruction of Hinduism, Ambedkar advocates the necessity of religion and actually suggests a reform of Hinduism with a Western-normative liberal approach that would put religion under the control of the state – a democratisation of priesthood would be the fundamental step to tackle the social oppression of caste system. The reform would be characterised by five points: '1. There should be one and only one standard book of Hindu religion', other books must be declared non-religious text by law. 2. Priesthood must be abolished or be a non-hereditary religious position to which all Hind may accede by passing a state exam. 3. Only certified priest shall be entitled to preside rite and transgressors shall be punished by law. 4. Priests shall submit to the state as public officer of moral, belief and works and bear legal responsibility in this field. '5. The number of priests should be limited by law according to the requirements of the state, as is done in the case of the ICS [Indian Civil Service]' (Ambedkar 2014 #24.1). Roy maintains 'Ambedkar's main concern was to privilege and legalise "constitutional morality" over the traditional, social morality of the caste system' (Roy 2014:45).

Gandhi *swaraj* implies the individual emancipation from the moral slavery of caste, Ambedkar writes:

There is no use having swaraj, if you cannot defend it. More important than the question of defending swaraj is the question of defending the Hindus under the swaraj. In my opinion, it is only when Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery (Ambedkar 2014 #26.4).

Ambedkar increasingly advocated political independence for the *Dalit*, as he insisted on the recognition of the *Dalit* as a minority, something opposite to Gandhi's nationalist and civilisational view. Gandhi agreed with Ambedkar that *swaraj* and untouchability could not go together and his social view for India was of a united 'civilisation' of diverse social groups, as he saw all Hindus belonging to the same tradition and believed that providing a separate recognition to the Untouchables as a minority would create irreconcilable social fractures. Since the inception he acknowledged untouchability as a sin of Hinduism, advocated for its total eradication and engaged in this struggle throughout his life, and especially from the time of the Poona Pact with Ambedkar in 1932.¹³⁰ Ambedkar contended that Gandhi was mainly a political strategist safeguarding the interests of higher castes Hindus, and that different than himself, did not have the emancipation of *Dalit* as a first aim.¹³¹ Ambedkar maintained that:

¹³⁰ *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (Servants of Untouchables Society) is the association founded by Gandhi after the Poona Pact in 1932 to give strength to the work for the eradication of untouchability. He also founded three journals in English (*Harijan*) Hindi (*Harijan Sevak*) and Gujarati (*Harijan Bandhu*) in this same period, although these journals were not strictly related to the issues of Untouchables. Giving a new name to '*Harijan*' and starting these initiatives for their uplift is the steady effort of the Mahatma to reform the common sense of Hindu society concerning Untouchables, a burst for self-purification.

¹³¹ At the second Round Table Conference (1931 – organised by the British to discuss political and constitutional reforms for India), the clash between Gandhi and Ambedkar occurred over the issue of political representation of Depressed Classes, which included *Dalit* and *Adivasi*. Although the issue was mainly debated with reference to the *Dalit* and Ambedkar represented them, the provision incorporated also *Adivasi* and the Issue was later resolved with the Poona Pact on 24 September 1932 (see also Anand 2014). Ambedkar made a proposal which was accepted by the British Prime Minister MacDonald to recognise both, a separate electorate for *Dalit* (proportional to their population) so that their candidates would be elected only by *Dalits* and independently from Caste Hindu party hierarchies. Moreover, in order to comply with Gandhi's preoccupation against separation, they would have a second vote for the general seats as well, so they remained integrated. Ambedkar advocated this measure for a limited period of time that was stipulated in twenty years. Gandhi did not want two representatives for *Dalit* and was preoccupied with their political segregation within the state institutions, and therefore rejected the separate electorate and went on hunger strike against it, while in Jail. For Gandhi, the *Dalit* should not have free representatives because they were an integral part of the Hindu community (Gandhi was ready to recognise Hindu, Muslim and Sikh as communities) and this kind of provision would undermine the proper Hindu religion. Ambedkar claimed that *Dalit* were politically much weaker than Muslims and Sikh and therefore deserved equal or superior constitutional protection, but Gandhi did not want to question the unity of the Hindu community creating a *Dalit* minority. Ambedkar received high social pressure

the caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilised society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilised society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments. The caste system is not merely a division of labourers—which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other (Ambedkar 2014 #4.1).

2.2.4 The re-emergence of the debate

The Arundhati Roy's essay *The Doctor and the Saint* (2014) is among the most discussed of recent re-presentation of the long and famous debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar concerning the caste system in India. Roy reinforces the assumption that Gandhi was mainly a political strategist aiming at protecting the interest of high caste Hindus and that he intended to involve the Untouchables in the struggle for independence but he did not really want their emancipation (see also Gudavarthy 2008). The main question of Roy's inquiry is:

How do we reconcile the idea of the non-violent Gandhi, the Gandhi who spoke Truth to Power, Gandhi the Nemesis of Injustice, the Gentle Gandhi, the Androgynous Gandhi, Gandhi the Mother, the Gandhi who (allegedly) feminised politics and created space for women to enter the political arena, the eco-Gandhi, the Gandhi of the ready wit and some great one-liners—how do we reconcile all this with Gandhi's views (and deeds) on caste? (Roy 2014:42–43).

Roy's problem is that although Gandhi reformed his position on caste during his life, he kept defending the necessity of the *varna* system in Indian society, even though it would

to accommodate Gandhi's requests and avoid his death and made a counter proposal for which the *Dalit* candidates would be elected by general vote but would be initially shortlisted by a primary election among *Dalit* who would select four candidates for each reserved constituency. This granted a certain independence in terms of nomination of candidates of the *Dalit* community, however less than in the 'communal award' which it substituted, and was the compromise established by the Poona pact and put in place in the elections of 1937 (Government of India Act 1935). Rajmohan Gandhi maintains that the pact was a double compromise achieved by Gandhi with the high caste Hindu and Untouchable leaders. '[T]he Poona Pact which was signed a year after the 1931 London conference, whereby Gandhi (and his colleagues and allies) agreed to something they had resisted until then, namely, reservations for Dalits, and Ambedkar (and his colleagues and allies) agreed to what they had resisted until then, namely, joint electorates' (R. Gandhi 2015b:84).

Gandhi defended until the end of his life the notion that separation of the electorate was against Hinduism and nationalism. In a letter to Amrit Kaur of the 20th of April 1947 he writes: 'MacDonald Award at the Round Table Conference which was born of a wicked conspiracy against Indian nationalism. For the first time it created a division amongst Hindus and Hindus while granting separate electorates for the so-called scheduled classes. It was against this vivisection of Hindu society that I had prophesied revolt [ref. Gandhi Speech at Minorities Committees Meeting during the second Round Table, 13 November 1931 London, (CWMG Vol. 48 pp. 293-8)]. As a result reservation of seats was considerably increased and primary elections were separated, but the total separation was undone. In my opinion, this was the utmost that could be conceded to the separatist tendency and the attempt to break up Hinduism' (CWMG Vol. 87 p. 315). Rajmohan Gandhi (2015a) and Narayan Desai (1999:121–33) highlight Ambedkar's satisfaction for the conditions of the pact. Referring to Mahadev Diary, Desai reports that Ambedkar invited Gandhi to work for the Untouchables' interests alone as opposed to the national welfare as that would make him their hero.

be completely unstructured and is a system that should include Untouchables in an equal standing with all castes and negate discrimination. Roy's overall analysis of Gandhi's life, thoughts and deeds is one sided,¹³² trying to show how 'human' the 'Saint' was, something that she candidly admits at the end of the section dedicated to Gandhi (Roy 2014:93–94, and confirmed in the debate with Rajmohan Gandhi – 2015).¹³³ Bias on Gandhi seems to be aimed at putting forward the positions of his interlocutor, Dr. Ambedkar, who – she defends – are more radical and equalitarian.¹³⁴ To achieve this unbalanced picture she sketches a portrait of

¹³² The main problem is methodological: Roy does not consider the context of the quotes she selectively picks from Gandhi's work. For a detailed account of Roy's prejudiced analysis see the contributions by Rajmohan Gandhi (2015a) and Nishikant Kolge (2014) articles. After Rajmohan Gandhi's response a debate among the two (and beyond) took place in the pages of *Economic and Political Weekly* (R. Gandhi 2015b; Kapoor 2016; Oza 2015; Roy 2015). Besides these accounts, Roy underestimates the relevance that Gandhi had with his civilisational approach and in the political struggle of Ambedkar himself. As an example, she acknowledges that Ambedkar made use of *satyagraha* without providing a clear statement concerning Gandhi's genius in the formulation of such doctrine, even if merely considered as a method of struggle. Another example, she translates Gandhi's theory of trusteeship with 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (Roy 2014:90), underestimating the richness of the knowledge due to the bias which emerges along the text: Gandhi was sponsored by rich industrialists. For more insight on trusteeship see Dasgupta (2003:118–31).

¹³³ The whole section on Gandhi does not properly consider the engagement of Gandhi for the Untouchables, as it is rather concentrated on showing Gandhi's racist bias in South Africa, that he worked for 'passenger' as opposed to 'indentured' Hindus (see also Krishna 2014), that his political leadership left behind a worst and disaggregated situation among Indians, that his political vision was informed by rich industrialists such as G. D. Birla or Gandhi's sexual experiments. The analysis fails a well-rounded consideration of Gandhi's life and deeds which cannot avoid engaging with his worldviews, the complex and rich political vision that it entails and the many social, political and epistemological achievements inscribed in Gandhi's life. Especially to understand his vision on *varnas*, around which the whole book-length essay is about, the analysis seems generally unfocused and detractive and substantially inaccurate. By reading this and similar analyses, an attentive reader is left with a sense of incompleteness and, to a large extent, injustice towards the 'man' even if one does not want to concede that he was a 'Saint'. Although Roy demonstrates a critical stance with Ambedkar when she shows his paternalist position concerning indigenous people of India, or *Adivasi* (Roy 2014:117–20), the text seems built to stress that on the issue of caste Ambedkar is accurate to tackle the roots of the abyssal discrimination as opposed to Gandhi. Roy stress that the latter not only did not want to tackle untouchability but by defending the *varna* system he wanted to reinforce such abyssal discrimination. Reading Ambedkar himself, and taking up the paternalist reading of Roy concerning Gandhi's discourse on Untouchables, we see a similar attitude of Ambedkar's discourse on *Adivasi*. Ambedkar writes: 'Civilising the aborigines means adopting them as your own, living in their midst, and cultivating fellow-feeling—in short, loving them. How is it possible for a Hindu to do this? His whole life is one anxious effort to preserve his caste' (Ambedkar 2014 #8.3). Roy fails to underline that the paternalism of Gandhi with the Untouchable is entrenched with his daily work and with engagement and indignation concerning their discrimination. Gandhi's position on *Adivasi* is well elaborated By Hardiman (2003:136–55) who suggests that it was controversial and marginal until the 1940s when the Mahatma engaged in *Adivasi* involvement in the national movement to avoid their separation or alignment with the Muslim league. While collaborators of Gandhi have been working in different forms with *Adivasi* since the 1920s, Gandhi himself followed these activities without keen interest as for the *Dalit*. Gandhi showed respect for their diversity but Gandhian workers tried to tackle supposed immorality of Indigenous people working on their education more than in support of their social struggles.

¹³⁴ Roy's essay has been criticised also by *Dalit* associations because it defends that Ambedkar was anti *Adivasi* and pro eugenics while Ambedkar opposed these justifications as an attempt to provide scientific grounds of caste (Shanmugavelan 2014a, 2014b). Shanmugavelan continues by affirming that the network of causes of

Gandhi that questions his historical successes, even turning them into concrete failures. She reinforces that Gandhi had a questionable vision of Indian history, traditions, religiosity and social settings. Roy disputes Gandhi's time in South Africa as well as in India and raises questions that emerged in other critical assessments of the Mahatma (including in recent biographies, see for instance Adams 2010). Roy's view, along with that of most of the other thinkers that engaged with Gandhi in a similar way, shows a limited capacity to accept the evolution that the Mahatma constantly re-stated along his life (well summarised by Hardiman 2003:126–36) as a fundamental key to understand his thoughts and civilisational vision. The only quality that Roy concedes to Gandhi is the quality that disqualifies the truthfulness of Gandhi's democratic vision, and that he was a brilliant political strategist (and manipulator), while Ambedkar was not. For this reason, Roy affirms that Gandhi could achieve historical political victories (as the Poona Pact avoiding a separate electorate for the Untouchables), against Ambedkar, the Untouchables and in favour of caste Hindus. Most importantly, although Roy recognises that Gandhi 'was to stitch together the various constituencies that would allow the Indian National Congress to claim it was the legitimate and sole representative of the emerging nation' (Roy 2014:58), she fails to comprehend the interplay of the struggle against colonialism, capitalism and social emancipation in Mahatma's vision.

2.2.5 *Gandhi's double struggle to eradicate untouchability*

We need to contextualise Roy's question, which is a consequence of Gandhi's debate with Ambedkar, and to do so it is fundamental to understand why and to what extent the Mahatma defended the *varna* system.

Gandhi engaged in a double battle for the emancipation of Untouchables within the Hindu community: one against high caste Hindus, to accept the reform: and one against the leaders of Untouchable communities, especially Ambedkar, to eliminate the caste system and reform the *varna* system and strengthen the unity of all Hindus (Hardiman 2003:126, 154–

discrimination which lead *Dalit* to be wary with the romanticism of rural life is counter-balanced with the risk of falling in other conditions of discrimination in neoliberal metropolitan territories, projecting Ambedkar's vision on 'pragmatic Western liberalism' is another shortcoming of Roy's analysis. Rajmohan Gandhi stresses that 'Some of Roy's unreasonable attacks may have resulted from a lack of knowledge. She has not been a Gandhi scholar for any length of time. The omissions in "The Doctor and the Saint" constitute the text's most serious weaknesses' (R. Gandhi 2015a:36).

55).¹³⁵ Towards the end of his life (19 June 1946), Gandhi stressed the challenge of his reformative mission, affirming that the achievements towards the removal of untouchability were not satisfactory among high caste Hindus while it was fairly satisfactory among the Untouchables. As opposed to Ambedkar, he insisted that social custom and not law could eradicate the problem: '[i]t can be removed only by enlightened public opinion' (CWMG Vol 85 p. 21). The debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar (partly annexed to the *Annihilation of Caste* by Ambedkar 2014),¹³⁶ shows that there is much convergence on the substance

¹³⁵ Desai (1999:129) stresses the relevance that Gandhi gave to the 'honour of Hindus' in the talks of 1932 with Ambedkar, as to preserve it (honour) the Hindus should be able to eradicate Untouchability voluntarily, and therefore be trusted by the Untouchables.

¹³⁶ See also the article by Gandhi that clarifies his position before the debate with Ambedkar 'Caste has to go' (H 16-11-1935). In the debate that occurred in 1936 after the diffusion of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar said that Gandhi did not respond to the merit of the argument. They agreed that moral judgment should prevail over the different religious texts that created unbearable prescriptions, the main difference is that Gandhi defends the religious tradition, besides the need to purify it, while Ambedkar insists that untouchability could be eradicated only by eradicating the tradition through a modern normative approach, as he wants to tackle the root of Hinduism. Ambedkar's position is justified by the consideration of Hinduism as a social normative framework based on hierarchy and discrimination more than as a religion.

Gandhi praised the position of Ambedkar in denouncing caste oppression and believed that it would serve to raise awareness on the issue and to help to tackle untouchability and for the Hindu religion self-purification, but their vision remained unconceivable with regards to Hinduism and at the personal level they were never very friendly. Ambedkar considered Gandhi a high caste Hindu protecting caste privileges and Gandhi thought that Ambedkar was a threat to the unity of the Hindu, against his and the Congress' nationalist project and that was even ready to use violent means for this end. See also 'SPEECH AT GANDHI SEVA SANGH MEETING-IV' 4-3-1936 (CWMG Vol. 62 p. 231; CWMG Vol. 62 pp. 142-3). Gandhi opposed the view that the Congress represented only caste Hindus, as he claimed several times, including at the second Round Table Conference, that it represented all Indians. The work with the Untouchable community surely served to reinforce this political claim, however it does not detract from Gandhi's genuine engagement which aim was self-purification and change of the social common sense. The debate intensified after Ambedkar announced the intention to convert to another religion (13 October 1935 at the Depressed Classes Conference in Yeola) with the famous sentence 'I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.' Twenty years later and two months before dying on 14 October 1956 Ambedkar converted back to Hinduism. In the 1940s Gandhi came closer to Ambedkar's position but Ambedkar insisted that the Congress was not emancipating *Dalits* but rather co-opting them (Ambedkar 1945).

The relation between Gandhi and Ambedkar started as an indirect cooperation in the 1920s, engaged in an oppositional struggle in the 1930s and ended up in an undeclared harmonisation of in the 1940s however the *Dalit* community has inherited a dualist division. 'Though their mutual debate encouraged both to modify their approaches in significant respects – so that by the 1940s there was less of an ideological gap between them – the bitterness of their encounter in the 1930s continues to inform the *Dalit* movement in India to this day' (see also R. Gandhi 2015a; Hardiman 2003:155), as well as a new wave of criticism against the Mahatma. In a radio interview at the BCC by Francis Watson (26 February 1955), Ambedkar reasserted his distance from Gandhi's views and his judgement of Gandhi as a political opponent and a strategist who was morally questionable and did not deserve the title of *Mahatma*. Ambedkar argued that he had a double narrative, as he presented his argument in English as a democrat but he was a more orthodox and conservative Hindu when he wrote in Gujarati, and he never reformed. Ambedkar was convinced that Gandhi defended the *Dalit* for dragging them into the Congress and for them to not oppose his *swaraj* movement because he was scared that the *Dalit* could constitute a separate organised minority group in India. Ambedkar said that Gandhi was an episode in the history of India and that he would vanish from the memory of Indians if the Congress would not celebrate his memory.

between the positions of the two concerning the removal of untouchability and the eradication of social hierarchies in Hindu society. The two, however, had opposite positions towards Hinduism and on the way in which the eradication of untouchability could be achieved.

The utopian vision of Gandhi starts from his stubborn intention to inflame a self-eradication of the worst forms of social discrimination within his community, a giant self-purification exercise that was an integral part of his spiritual politics based on truth and non-violence (CWMG Vol. 85 p. 27).¹³⁷ In this attempt, he worked for a dialogue between the two extremes of Hindu society (the high caste Hindus and the Untouchables) in a constant search of national unity. The one goal in which Gandhi has always agreed with Ambedkar was the annihilation of the caste system as a racist class division of society. Ambedkar spent all his life trying to destroy the caste system, and when he lost hope that it could happen, he embraced Buddhism, a religion of equality, compassion and personal growth. For Gandhi, who was indeed struggling to make Indian 'civilisation' an example for the world, the partition of Untouchables was the prospect of a radical failure of his own alternative idea of democracy, but the radical position of Ambedkar was unacceptable by higher Castes Hindus who were very influential in the Congress and the freedom movement. If India was not able to show to the world that its own civilisation could grow an alternative bottom-up model of democracy, how could it claim that Western civilisation needed to dialogue with the Indian on equal

¹³⁷ Kolge (2014) demonstrates that Gandhi's approach for the eradication of untouchability took up the existing social reforms undertaken by high caste Hindus, but subverted their logic. While high caste Hindus advocated an upward social mobility (*Shuddhi* meaning self-purification or reconversion to Hinduism) by which the Untouchables would purify themselves and reach up to caste, Gandhi advocated the opposite move of the recognition by the high caste Hindu of their sin in the practice of untouchability and thereby of their resentment and consequent social reform. For Gandhi, the high castes should purify and go towards Untouchables as a fundamental step for the eradication of untouchability because they keep the system going. Gandhi thus rejected the superiority of Brahminical tradition and advocated the development of social horizontality by volunteering downgrading of those higher in status. Kolge writes: 'Gandhi on the other hand, adopted a method that can be described as 'downward mobility'. In his 30 years' long struggle against caste difference and hierarchies, Gandhi through personal example, persuasion, argument and propaganda, tried to educate upper caste Hindus to give up their caste prejudices of purity and pollution in order to purify themselves' (Kolge 2014:158). While this approach tackled the root cause of untouchability it was also more difficult to digest by high caste Hindus who generated much resistance. Kolge maintains that for some of high caste Hindus reformers the involvement in actions for the removal of untouchability was a mere response to the intensification of Muslims and Christian charity activities with *Dalits*.

standing? The critical approach that Gandhi advocated for other civilisations he applied to his own civilisation in the first place and worked for its improvement from the inside.

2.2.6 The varnas democracy based on service – duties over rights

Gandhi struggled against the recognition of the Untouchables as a minority group and against their segregation along with that of Muslims and all other minorities. He did so by reinforcing his civilisational struggle against the colonial opponent and its capitalist system.¹³⁸ Gandhi looked at the *varnas* as a revisited and non-exclusionary system of social organisation that was able to arrange each individual in society according to her natural qualities, as opposed to birth privileges. This was the alternative to the greed of capitalism, the market society and possessive individualism. ‘The law of varna is the antithesis of competition which kills’ (H 6-3-1937). The *varna* system was for Gandhi a part of the *swadeshi* spirit of democracy, the alternative social organisational structure, and the point through which to reconcile society with non-possession individualism. Panikkar (Panikkar 1995:130–32) advocated a non-dualistic vision between religion and politics. This view was advocated by Gandhi as he opposed the existence of the four thousands sub-castes or *Jati* and believed that only the four *varnas* should exist. Gandhi saw the *varnas* as assigning duties to the individual for the community. In passages useful also to clarify the difference between the caste and the *varna* system, he writes:

As for caste I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence, it is a mental state. We need to think of and to assert equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equalities in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.

I do, however, believe in varna which is based on hereditary occupations. Varnas are four to mark four universal occupations, – imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all whether one knows its existence or not. But scientist who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism started

¹³⁸ Gandhi writes: ‘Historically speaking, caste may be regarded as man’s experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against heartless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed’ (VI 5-1-1921). Later Gandhi would use this kind of discourse only in reference to the *varna* not the caste system and would advocate the destruction of the latter.

the world by its discovery and application of the law of varna. When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of varna resulted in innumerable castes, with unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to intermarriage and interdining. The law of varna has nothing to do with these restrictions.

[...] According to my definition of varna there is no varna in operation at present in Hinduism.¹³⁹ The so-called Brahmans have ceased to impart knowledge. They take to various other occupations. This is more or less true of the other varnas. In reality, being under foreign domination we are all slaves, and hence less than Sudras – untouchables of the West. (YI 4-6-1931).

When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves, we may have the four varnas according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But varna then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service will be called Brahmans. They will assume no superior airs but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true varnadharma. Its real revival would mean true democracy (H 4-4-1936).

The basic meaning of the four *varnas* for Gandhi is the primacy of duty over right and privilege. Towards the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s Gandhi increasingly referred to 'caste' in order to express the need of eradication, while the use of *varna* is less frequent. This can be read as an epistemological shift of his focus from the primacy of the ideal Indian alternative civilisation to the struggle against the social oppression of the caste system. While he intensified his engagement to strengthen inter-caste interaction,¹⁴⁰ he increasingly referred to caste as opposed to *varna*, showing that his approach to the topic was less idealistic and closer to Ambedkar's criticism. The communal divide of this period, the partition of India and the emergence of violence around the country played a crucial role in this change. However, Gandhi never compromised the nationalist vision of united India with a united Hindu community and he reasserted it in a letter to Ambedkar in 1944 when he also wrote a note on

¹³⁹ He reiterates this until the end of his life. For instance in 1945: "I believe today counts. I wish to say that the caste system as it exists today in Hinduism is an anachronism" (CWMG Vol. 79 p. 384).

¹⁴⁰ Along his life, he passed from encouraging intra-caste marriages, to discouraging them and encouraging inter-caste marriages and, later, supporting only caste Hindu-Untouchable marriages. In the interview that he generously conceded to me over two days at his village of Veddchi (Surat district, Gujarat), Narayan Desai (interviews I and II), son of Gandhi's personal Secretary Mahadev Desai, sadly remembered that Gandhi did not preside over his wedding because neither him nor his bride was an Untouchable. At this time Gandhi was convinced that to tackle untouchability, the marriages between Untouchables and caste Hindu should be welcomed and he did not attend other kinds of marriages. Narayan Desai had an inter-caste marriage, which Gandhi considered to be the second best kind of marriage (the last being the marriage within the same caste), but although Narayan Desai had an extremely close relation to Gandhi (he considered himself his 'grandchildren') nonetheless the Mahatma did not preside over the ceremony because his vow about caste-Untouchable marriages was taken by then.

their personal relationship, 'I must admit my failure to come nearer to you' (CWMG Vol. 69 p 13).

On the one hand, the position between Gandhi and Ambedkar remained irreconcilable concerning the relation of *Dalit* oppression and the homogeneity of the Hindu community and concerning the role of common sense vs. the state and the law to regulate the Hindu religion. On the other hand, both leaders attacked the root cause of untouchability, which is the social stratification of the caste system. Stratification was something Ambedkar tackled sharply since the beginning and this encouraged Gandhi to follow suit. The Mahatma, besides possessing equal aberration as the Doctor, gained a matured and equal understanding of the root causes and gave the issue an increasingly high priority in the long list of struggles in India. This aided his effort to strengthen the Indian civilisational democratic alternative to Western colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy.

Gandhi started to reconsider his position on the four *varnas*,¹⁴¹ something that he did very openly in the 'Forward to Varnavyavastha' of 31 May 1945 (CWMG Vol 80 pp. 222-4). In this text, without disputing his firmness in the idea of truth and non-violence he recognises his maturation in life and changed view. He maintains that the *varnas* are the civilisational unicity of Hinduism for the world and advocates that they be based on aspiration and *karma* without hierarchy among them. This would also ease the relations between Hinduism and other religions. The *dharma* of Hindus is their voluntary acceptance of the horizontality among *varnas*, where all people, regardless of their *varna* or occupation, are in service of society without capital accumulation.

Voluntary acceptance and pursuit of this moral law of *dharma* would deliver *swaraj*. Gandhi did not defend the *varna* system due to the turmoil of the independence struggle (Kolge 2014), yet he defended a utopian horizon for his vision of *swaraj*, much beyond political independence. On 20 July 1946 in a talk with the member of the Harijan Sevak Sangh (CWMG Vol. 85 pp. 23-8), Gandhi confirmed that he would like to abolish the caste system but that he did not feel he could impose his vision on wider society (and especially high caste Hindus). He

¹⁴¹ Prem Anand Mishra (interview) advocates that after 1935 Gandhi softened his vision of the *varna* system and advocated for social mobility among *varnas*, but he also believed that the system had preserved Indian society (or civilisation) and was an instrument against British colonialism.

declares himself ready to support specific *satyagraha* on civil and social rights for the *Dalit*.¹⁴² The delusion of Gandhi's own life was that the caste system was shackled but resisted while the *varna* system was increasingly misunderstood with the caste system, and so his utopian perspective lost the symbolic potential of the civilisational alternative view of democracy.

2.3 Gandhian democratisation and Inter-civilisational democratic translations

2.3.1 *Inter-civilisational approach to democratisation*

Yasuaki Onuma elaborates *a transcivilisational perspective on international law* (Onuma 2010). The Japanese scholar advocates that international law (based on states), even if enriched by a transnational perspective (accounting for non-state or non-governmental actors such as Transnational Corporations, Non-Governmental Organisations, the media and the 'community of experts'), does not overcome Western-centrism. While a transnational perspective limits state-centrism with its domestic monolithic and standardising approach, the non-state actors still advocate for the modern Western-centric approach. In order to include non-Western centric actors, beyond non-state entities, Onuma proposes a transcivilisational perspective 'from which we see, sense, recognize, interpret, assess, and seek to propose solutions to ideas, activities, phenomena and problems transcending national boundaries, by

¹⁴² In his last year, Gandhi restated this concept in various occasions. On 12 February 1947 he confirmed that for Hinduism to survive it must be casteless and the eradication of untouchability implies the extinction of castes and he encouraged Untouchables to merge with all Hindus (CWMG Vol. 86 p. 459). He argued again on 13 July 1947 'If India wants to survive in a world of atom bombs, she must be disciplined and united first, and untouchability and caste distinctions should go' (CWMG Vol. 88 p. 352). Towards the end of his life Gandhi spoke less about *varnas* and more about castes, giving prevalence to social discrimination and to the ideal social organisation embraced by the two terms. However, he never renounced his ideal of democratisation while he harmonised his struggle against social oppression with the one of Ambedkar. In a prayer meeting on 23 November 1947 he shows that his ideal of a civilisational non-hierarchical *varna* – alternative to capitalism – was still in his mind, and with a wider flexibility concerning the division of labour, the *varna* system serves the purpose of organising labour and people can transit to one another (CWMG Vol. 90. p. 94). Tridip Suhrud (interview) illustrates that Gandhi's civilisational proposal of democracy is not a traditional one because it encompasses an extreme level of equality (women, caste, indigenous, minorities) which was never implemented before. In his later years, Gandhi engaged with the negation of 'caste' and the caste system rather than with the idealistic views of the *varnas* and its civilisational potential. He insisted that all Hindus should consider themselves equals and as belonging to the *Shudra*, that is the last of the four castes, all equally servants of society (CWMG Vol. 69 p. 220). This shows that Gandhi increasingly gave priority to the struggle against *Dalit* oppression – a fracturing social issue whose achievement through social self-purification was still a utopian objective. His civilisational perspectives were attenuated by the course of historical events of violence and division and his agenda, concentrated on the urgency of social cohesion, took priority over the objective of social *swaraj* because it was a factual prerequisite for it. Suhrud (interview) explains that besides his efforts for the eradication of untouchability, Gandhi was unable to see the equation, enunciated by Jyotirao Phule, between *varna*, *jati*/caste, purity/pollution and untouchability.

developing a cognitive and evaluative framework based on the recognition of plurality of civilizations and cultures that have long existed in human history' (Onuma 2010:81).

Onuma advocates an approach that talks about 'values', as in the transnational perspective, but that also talks about 'virtues' and converts from aggressiveness to modesty, thereby promoting the 'virtue of modesty' (Onuma 2010:79). To achieve a transcivilisational perspective, Onuma advocates for the inclusion of other actors, generally excluded in international and transnational approaches, such as indigenous people, ethnic minorities, religious communities, transboundary religious communities and groups and networks based on other interests.¹⁴³ Onuma had initially proposed an 'intercivilisational' perspective (since 1981) but later preferred a 'transcivilisational' (since 2001) one in order to minimise the criticism that was raised over a misunderstanding with Huntington on the 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) and its substantive and monolithic notion of civilisations.¹⁴⁴

Presented above was an exploration of how Gandhi links civilisation to an integrated social system based on the 'good conduct', in which he bases the spirit of democracy. His thought also provides another insight. Through a reading of Gandhi, I consider civilisation a metaphor for an ever-changing group of cultures which include religious, political, social, moral and economic diversities. This is because culture is not fixed so civilisation is not static

¹⁴³ Among the values and the virtues stand the commons or the 'common heritage of humanity' that include material and immaterial goods such as international airspace, oceans (including their seabed), the poles, masterpieces of the arts and architecture representing historical ethical and political memory of humanity (Pureza 1993, 1998; Santos 2002b:301–11), and rights of future generations (Gianolla 2009b, 2009a).

¹⁴⁴ Huntington identifies nine main civilisations: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japanese (Huntington 1996:26–27). He defines their dynamism and monolithic character as follows: '[c]ivilizations have no clear-cut boundaries and no precise beginnings and endings. People can and do redefine their identities and, as a result, the composition and shapes of civilizations change over time. The cultures of peoples interact and overlap. The extent to which the cultures of civilizations resemble or differ from each other also varies considerably. Civilizations are nonetheless meaningful entities, and while the lines between them are seldom sharp, they are real' (Huntington 1996:43). 'Virtually all the major civilizations in the world in the twentieth century either have existed for a millennium or, as with Latin America, are the immediate offspring of another long-lived civilization. While civilizations endure, they also evolve. They are dynamic; they rise and fall; they merge and divide; and as any student of history knows, they also disappear and are buried in the sands of time.' (Huntington 1996:44). This view of civilisation is exclusionary and it is the history of the winners. A simple question shows its shortcomings: in which of these nine civilisations would members of indigenous peoples of Latin America, Australia or India belong? The response is absence from the map. Huntington – at least for Latin America – is clear, they no longer exist: 'In the course of European expansion, the Andean and Mesoamerican civilizations were effectively eliminated' (Huntington 1996:51). The epistemologies of the South and the sociology of absences specifically, ransom these cultures and people, brings the maps produced by these civilisations in a dialogue with the maps studied by Huntington, and therefore back to the political, economic, social and cultural map and to the dialogue within and beyond civilisations.

nor uninominal for subjectivities.¹⁴⁵ To engage in the definition of a democratic vision that is an alternative to political-colonialism, I revert to the *inter* – as oppose to the *trans* (preferred by Onuma) – prefix to describe the process of unlearning and re-learning democratic knowledge and exchanging democratic experience. Parallel to the open acceptance of the epistemologies of the South, questioning the boundaries of the sphere of the political and the notion and perimeter of the state, the actual argument of Gandhi was to demystify Western civilisation and its monolithic hegemony opposing the notion of Indian civilisation made of cultures in dialogue.¹⁴⁶ Dialogue is constitutional of a democratic approach that acknowledges antagonism but avoids the clash. How can such dialogue take place?

The epistemologies of the South elaborate on the theory of intercultural translations (Santos 2014:212–36) examined in the next section.¹⁴⁷ Different than in international law,

¹⁴⁵ This acceptance is akin to Onuma's understanding: 'there are diverse cultures both within a civilisation and transcending civilizations' (Onuma 2010:83). Onuma also rightly maintains that '[h]umans do not belong exclusively to a particular culture or civilisation. In most cases they sense, think and behave according to plural civilizations and cultures simultaneously. [...] Any society, any social setting is a hybrid in terms of culture and civilization' (Onuma 2010:100–101). While the border between civilisation and culture is blurred in Onuma, his notion is much wider than the one of Huntington opening the acceptance to those cultures marginalised by the 'clash of civilization'. The epistemologies of the South go further in claiming that inter-cultural and inter-civilisational dialogue implies the expansion of the real towards the future (epistemologies of emergences) beyond towards the past (epistemologies of absences). Gandhi's reformative approach to Hinduism and his nationalist appropriation as an attempt to unite under the 'civilisational' the different cultures of India (including Hindu subcultures such as the Untouchables) was a civilisational emergence that delivered political independence but not a democracy as *swaraj* as advocated by the Mahatma. Kumar (2002) reads the history of India through the evolution of the Hindu perspective challenged by colonialism and revitalised by the freedom struggle. He maintains that India is a civilisation-state, as opposed to a nation-state, due to the interplay of the complex and historical political, social, economic, cultural and religious identities of Indian people. Their identities are created in three levels from the bottom-up: 'kinship and community', 'locality and region' and 'affiliation to pan-Indian civilisation' and it is characterised by plurality and tolerance.

¹⁴⁶ Gandhi roots such dialogue in the history of Indian civilisation to burst it again in the divided social groups of colonial India. 'The Indian culture of our times is in the making. Many of us are striving to produce a blend of all the cultures which seem today to be in clash with one another. No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive. There is no such thing as pure Aryan culture in existence today in India. Whether the Aryans were indigenous to India or were unwelcome intruders, does not interest me much. What does interest me is the fact that my remote ancestors bladed with one another with the utmost freedom and we of the present generation are a result of that blend' (H 9-5-1936). Gandhi defended India from the clash of cultures and civilisations, and with his non-violent means he objected to the cultural hegemony of the coloniser and strengthened Indian civilisation. This does not mean that Indian civilisation was homogeneous under Gandhi's guidance, dissent and difference (e.g., with Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Subhas Chandra Bose and others) are part of the civilisational dynamics. If we look at Gandhi in history, he was able to provide a common signifier to different cultures in struggling against colonialism. If we look at Gandhi's philosophy, we identify his attempted intercivilisational dialogue in the construction of a democratic uniqueness as opposed to the incorporation of liberal democracy.

¹⁴⁷ Although he does not reject the use of the expression 'intercultural dialogue' – in accordance with the use in the literature, Santos prefers 'intercultural translation' because he focuses on the epistemological and political rather than the moral dimension. 'My concern is not with ethics or hermeneutics per se but rather with

where there is no political-democratic regime (at best a diplomatic one), in the domestic context is the state that frames the border of the political perimeter. In that perimeter an intercivlisational approach is advocated which looks for political cultural diversity within and acknowledges political cultures without. Huntington divides culture from politics and state from society, as ‘since civilizations are cultural not political entities, they do not, as such, maintain order, establish justice, collect taxes, fight wars, negotiate treaties, or do any of the other things which governments do’ (Huntington 1996:44). Both Gandhi and Santos have the opposite perspective, as they believe that state, society, culture and politics are strictly interlinked and they form the alternative democratic grammar to oppose the subtle cultural imperialism of the West that is inscribed in liberal democracy.¹⁴⁸ Democracy is not a mere political issue (which incorporates the culture of the political form of liberal democracy), but rather, is also a social, economic and cultural space of relations. Democracy includes these diversities that combined shape the organisational form to govern society and distribute powers within it.

The inter-civlisational approach to democracy questions the domain of the state, as on the one hand it recognises the rising challenge of global issues advocating that solutions cannot be domestic, while on the other hand it contests the political-colonial division between state and civil society advocating for a different interaction among the two and a different structure of the institutions of the former.

2.3.2 *State and civil society*

Gandhi criticizes Western civilisation for its focus on power and pleasure and the detriment of morality and spirituality, and he harshly argues against state centralism. He stated ‘[t]he Prime Minister is more concerned [about his power] than about the welfare of Parliament. His energy is concentrated upon securing the success of his party’ (Gandhi 1938

intermovement politics, that is, with the creation of conditions for thicker alliances and aggregations of political interests. This also explains why I prefer the concept of translation to the concept of dialogue. In reciprocal translation the focus is on working through differences in order to identify the scope and the limitations of alliance building’ (Santos 2014:214 footnote 3).

¹⁴⁸ During the debate of a recently independent India, Gandhi made his views clear about the epistemological perspective concerning university and political science. ‘Though we are politically free, we are barely free from the subtle domination of the West. I have nothing to say to that school of politicians who believe that knowledge can only come from the West. Nor do I subscribe to the belief that nothing good came out of the West’ (H 2-11-1947).

Chap. V). Santos (1995:411–16, 1999:103–9, 2002b:363–69) explains that the separation of state and civil society corresponds to the separation of the political from economics. This, in turn, consolidated capitalist social relations that fostered economic exploitation and neutralised the revolutionary potential of modernity, and thereby limited the scope of democracy. He says '[c]onfined to the public place, the democratic ideal was neutralised or strongly limited in its emancipatory potential' (Santos 1995:415), and therefore 'it is today more imperative than ever to present a credible alternative to the conceptual orthodoxy of the state/civil society dualism' (Santos 1995:415–16). Kothari advocates for a radical reconsideration of the relationship between the state and civil society, a relationship which he argues is limiting current democratic theory. Kothari affirms:

We need a new theory of democracy that can comprehend the incapacity of existing institutional and ideological models [...]. At present, we have no theory of democracy. The theory that emerged from the west (now defunct) was based on an inordinately atomistic view of both the individual and the state, a disproportionately homogeneous conception of social and cultural reality, and was excessively influenced by the competitive ethos of bourgeois capitalism. Neither the socialist attempt to establish a welfare state nor the communist model of people's democracy have been able to cope with the new consciousness of the rights and dignities of diverse populations that has emerged all round the world, in particular, the third world. For the new consciousness cannot find fulfilment by merely focussing on the capture of state power, and the policies and programmes that the state should pursue. 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. The state and civil society have to deal with the issue in the relationship between the state and democratic process in a period of growing social turmoil and global managerial response. 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 my emphasis).

Questioning the duality between the state and civil society, Gandhi and the epistemologies of the South question the market (or capital), the rigid division of public-political vs. private-unpolitical (and deregulated) spaces. They respond to this challenge with a bottom-up creation of meanings that give back value to civil society and reconsider the monoculture or civilisational monologue that produced the dualism. The concept of civil society is debatable, and neither Gandhi nor Santos adopt the liberal acceptance of the concept. The Gandhian concept of *sarvodaya* and Santos' critique of social fascism highlight that the margin/periphery or the metaphorical South is the starting point. 'Gandhi's inventions for action in civil society, satyagraha and sarvodaya, often identified the state as the problem,

not the solution’ (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006:35). Santos argues that in the last few decades, neoliberalism has reinforced this idea, as the state – impoverished of its regulative role – is the problem, along with the current form of ‘low intensity democracy’ (Santos 2010c:67).

Bridging the state and civil society implies two major actions-objectives: first, decentralise and devolve to grassroots politics in order to re-centre politics on the themes promoted by civil society and its actors, especially grassroots social movements because they work closer to the more marginalised; – second, undermine the conditions of self-reproduction of elitism strengthening a people-centred participation approach. This is achieved through the reformulation of political leadership, its accountability, its rotation and representability (its limits, competences, and interaction-participatory approach). The leadership needs to get close to the people, re-prioritise daily issues in the political agenda, and go beyond the demagogy of electoral politics. This kind of politics works with the people and takes advantage of their close experience to issues on the ground and experiments with solutions promoted by the people. It also has preferred channels to bring these solutions into the institutional-political arena. In other words, this political approach is characterised by institutional commitment to participation without monopolising its possible forms. Here, the people are the subject of action as opposed to the elite. Representatives come close to the represented as they are those who coordinate, facilitate and translate people’s initiatives into state infrastructure where it is necessary.¹⁴⁹ Wiredu (2007:159) states: ‘having a

¹⁴⁹ There are several good examples of the emerging practice of participation. These must be reinforced by maintaining their autonomy and expanding their influence in the state’s politics, both at the local and the national level. This seems to be among the space of wider applicability of intercultural translation (see next section) towards political participation. I list here four very different examples. The first is the participatory politics of the Indian state of Kerala, the decentralisation and devolution of government to the local communities based on the state’s initiative (Heller, Harilal, and Chaudhuri 2007; Heller and Isaac 2005; Ramakantan 2009; Saxena 2015; Sebastian 2008). The second example is the grassroots work of thousands of social movements dedicated to the local struggle for democratisation. As a case, I mention the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS - Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) in rural Rajasthan. This social movement is engaged with the extension of the state’s funding programmes, transparency, local development, and interaction in the democratisation of the state – such as with the enactment of the Right to Information law (Roy 2000, interviews Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey). MKSS was the promoter of the National campaign for the Right to Information believing that transparency in public administration and in the records of public office increase the moral quality of democracy. The third example is the multiplicity of citizen initiatives collectively labelled ‘active citizenship’. They are characterised for being informal, autonomous, oriented to policies and not on politics (not interested in electoral politics nor supporting it), and for the primacy of making as opposed to demanding (Moro 2012, 2016; interview). The fourth example is ‘participatory budgeting’, as developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil since the 1980s and now spreading in thousands of cities around the world (Allegratti 2014; Dias 2014; Santos 1998a, 2005c; Sintomer et al. 2012; Sintomer, Herzberg, and Allegratti 2013). These are just a few example of many

representative is, or ought to be, only the beginning of citizen input into governmental decision-making'. The state may be the oppressor of the marginalised as well as the facilitator of participatory democracy through a politics that subverts social classifications and re-orientes power sharing horizontally.

While Gandhi's political testament advocated for the dismissal of the Congress party to create the association for the service of the people (H 15-2-1948), his proposal was in the orbit of fostering a different relationship between the Congress party and the people, the state and civil society, the public and the private. Gandhi's testament cast a different model of devolution and leadership, that is, politics as a service to society. Wiredu (2007:165ss) equally questions the presence of parties and elaborates on a consensus model of democracy (on the tradition of pre-colonial African polities) in which the role of parties is radically reshaped- disconnected from its sectarian power and reconnected to the representation of social interests. He argues that consensus is inclusive (all parties participate in decision making) and based on interest not on institutionalised parties. Consensus increases participation and involvement in decision-making and prevents the crystallisation of political party structures oriented to hold government as oppose to simply defend the societal interest. Wiredu claims that consensus democracy must therefore be a party-less system, where party means institutional power oriented political forces.¹⁵⁰ Simone Weil (1950) supports the suppression of parties and criticises them for their vague political doctrines and their poor

different participatory practices, not segregated from each other and at times grouping similar initiatives under different labels, where civil society interacts very differently with the state. While active citizenship claims complete independence, participatory budgeting is increasingly produced and reproduced by local governments. The question is raised as to the role of the representatives, autonomy of the process, and the degree of participation. The grassroots movement in Rajasthan are politically independent from the state and aim at stimulating its democratisation and attention to the rural and poor people of the region, while in Kerala participation is part of the state's framework. There is no single answer concerning the way forward and any single proposal standardised within liberal representative regimes would be undemocratic – if possible at all. These examples are nonetheless interesting in inspiring further reflection on representation, participation, leadership, the role of the state, the role of parties and ideas-ideologies and so on. The collective website <http://participedia.net> gathers information on numerous participatory experiences around the world (Fung and Warren 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Kothari (1964, 1967) describes the Congress-party system after Indian independence as based on consensus, while other parties played a function of pressure and control of Congress' politics. A system with internal party democracy and plurality combined with the capacity to absorb groups and movements from outside and thereby to prevent the formation of strong external oppositions. Since the Congress was the bulk of the independence movement 'the party representing a historical consensus also continues to represent the present consensus' (Kothari 1964:1165). DeSouza (2000:213) maintains that this party system lasted for about two decades after independence.

ability to represent social interests. Their ends are vague and unreal but with the axiom of power parties claim electoral support to achieve their interests (see also Olivetti 2013).

Reinventing democratic theory implies to envisage forms of post-political-colonial or ‘high intensity’ democracy (Santos 2010c). The path includes a reconsideration of the place of sovereignty and the combination of representation and participation to implement political ecological thinking, through the inter-cultural and inter-political¹⁵¹ translation of different democratic ideas and demands. The hostility of political parties, social movements and institutions among and within their proper plurality, has been an obstacle for the development of forms of high intensity democracy and has radicalised Western monoculture and mono-civilisation political theory leading to political-colonialism. Institutionalisation and non-institutional politics must engage with each other to expand the democratic interplay, as ‘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’ (Santos 2010c:70).

2.3.3 *Ecological thinking and democratisation*

In order to understand the relevance of intercultural translation we need to explore the founding sociologies of absences and emergences. The sociology of absences is an ‘inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as nonexistent, that is, as a noncredible alternative to what exists’ (Santos 2014:171). The sociology of absence identifies five monocultures that divide the existent from the absent; these monocultures are: knowledge, linear time, naturalisation of difference, dominant scale and the capitalistic logic of productivity. Together they respectively produce absences as ‘the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local, and the nonproductive’ (Santos 2006c, 2012, 2004, see also 2014:174). As an alternative to the creation of absences, the monocultures are substituted by ecologies by which a transgressive sociology expands the range of diversity that is not merely tolerated but that is considered valid and present. These ecologies are: the ecology of knowledges, temporalities, recognition, trans-scale and productivities. The ecological thinking emerging

¹⁵¹ Santos maintains that ‘intercultural translation is also interpolitical translation, a procedure that promotes the intermovement politics at the source of counterhegemonic globalization’ (Santos 2014:213).

from the epistemologies of the South expands the present experience by; bringing back to the present those social experiences that the mainstream declared absent and by enlarging the future through an exercise of sociological imagination that Santos defines as the ‘sociology of emergence’.

The sociology of emergences consists of undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledges, practices, and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximize the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration. Such symbolic enlargement is actually a form of sociological imagination with a double aim: on the one hand, to know better the conditions of the possibility of hope; on the other, to define principles of action to promote the fulfillment of those conditions (Santos 2014:184).

This sociological framework reinforces the understanding that knowledge is potentially infinite with an unprecedented tension towards the future. It also implies the humble acknowledgement that there cannot exist a general theory of social emancipation or democratisation and looking at emergent social experiences.¹⁵² Any concepts of people or civilisation that originate at the margin of modern liberal representative regimes need to deal with the re-emerging plurality of world knowledge based in a negative consensus, what is, a negation of theoretical centralism:

consensus expressing a certain negative universalism – the idea that no struggle, objective or agent has the overall recipe for the social emancipation of humanity – I have been suggesting that, in this phase of transition, what we do need, if not a general theory of social emancipation, is, at least, a general theory about the impossibility of a general theory. In lieu of a general theory of social emancipation, I propose a translation procedure involving the different partial projects of social emancipation. [...] What needs to be ascertained is to what extent some of the elements of European political culture are today common cultural and political heritage of the world. Take some of those elements as example: human rights, secularism, citizenship, the State, civil society, public sphere, equality before the law, the individual, the distinction between public and private, democracy, social justice, scientific rationality, popular sovereignty. These concepts were proclaimed in theory and often denied in practice; in colonialism, they were applied to destroy alternative political cultures (Santos 2010b:237–38).

The negative consensus implies a need to recognise priority in defining democratisation over any single definition of democracy, especially the hegemonic concept of liberal representative democracy which is considered the one that is universally valid for the large scale polities. However, an ecological thinking model looks beyond universalism and

¹⁵² Gandhi himself did not attempt to create a general theory but precisely to contrast general theories through ‘its refusal to privilege modernism’s commitment to the epistemology of universal truths, objective knowledge and master narratives’ (Rudolph and Rudolph 2006:4).

towards the exclusions or absences that it creates. According to Santos ‘Epistemological diversity is neither the simple reflection of epiphenomenon or ontological diversity or heterogeneity nor a range of culturally specific ways of expressing a fundamentally unified world’ (Santos et al. 2008:XXXI).

The ecology of knowledges applied to political theory is based on an inner democratisation among different knowledges of democracy and not on the absolute priority of one over the other. This is because the ‘ecology of knowledges challenges universal and abstract hierarchies and the powers that, through them, have been naturalized by history’ (Santos 2014:190). This is where priority is given to the type of knowledge that grants wider participation of the political actors and especially of political subjectivities. Ecological thinking recognises dynamic and situated hierarchies where collisions of knowledges are dealt with the adoption of the principle of precaution which ‘must result in judgments not based on abstract hierarchies between knowledges but stemming from democratic deliberations about gains and losses’ (Santos 2014:205). The procedure of intercultural translation is a dialogue open to Western and non-Western democratic experiences that can enrich the form in which democracy is implemented. However, the ecological theory, being alien to any general theory, accepts the incompleteness and remains democratically open to wider democratisation. For this reason, Santos suggests ‘equal weight be given to the idea of indispensability and to the idea of inadequacy, that is to say, incompleteness’, which means that ‘the point is to construct an ethical and political position without grounding it on any absolute principle’ (Santos 2010a:238), which is – indeed – the translation procedure.

Before addressing translation a few questions arise: what is to be considered political theory? What is not? What level of a scientific basis is necessary for a democratic knowledge to enter the translation?

The line of inclusion is blurred for two reasons: ethical and epistemological. From the ethical point of view, not all the claims of social groups are considered equally legitimate. Boundaries to legitimacy are an even more distorted confine that can be dictated, as for instance, by the use of violence. Even legitimacy needs to be situated because there is no clear threshold. For Gandhi, all types or levels of violence were the bare limit, but Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) switched from non-violence to violence in their struggle

against state oppression and apartheid, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas have had a similar account of violent struggle. However, violence is one of the ethical grounds that demarcate democratic from undemocratic movements. Other grounds include the reason for the confrontation of the established authority (e.g., substantially different political claims such as identity, independence, control of resources, and mere subjugation of population), and the availability of institutional opportunities to engage in constitutional democratic debates. This makes it clear that ethical and epistemic grounds have much in common.

From the epistemological perspective, the perimeter of what is considered political knowledge is compartmented in internal and external political knowledge plurality.

All kinds of knowledge have internal and external limits. The internal limits are restrictions concerning interventions in the real world. The external limits result from the recognition of alternative interventions made possible by other forms of knowledge. The hegemonic forms of knowledge only understand the internal limits. The counter-hegemonic usage of modern science constitutes a parallel exploration of both internal and external limits. Hence, the counter-hegemonic usage of science cannot be restricted to science alone; it only makes sense in an ecology of knowledges (Santos 2012:58).

Santos elaborates on the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic as being a plastic expansion of inclusion where the former restricts and the latter expands the criteria of inclusion of democratic subjectivities. Internal plurality is the acknowledgement within political theory with the main (and over simplified) opposition between liberal and socialist theoretical and political families (to be expanded in a potentially infinite ramification of the two). Since liberal democracy is the mainstream canon of democracy, especially in the age of neoliberal globalisation that has been fostered after the cold war since the 1990s, internal plurality consists in the intellectual and political debate stimulated by socialist thinkers and political activists, and by liberal theory and political debates (that result within politics itself). Liberalism and socialism are the theoretical pillars of the internal debate of political science and they have two parallel pluralities that together form the internal plurality of globalised modernity with its Western origin. The extension of this plurality also includes the ideas of radical democracy. This refers to those who responded to the question ‘is it meaningful to call oneself a democrat? And if so, in line with what interpretation of the world?’, which responses were collected in ‘Democracy in what State?’ (Agamben et al. 2011).

The internal plurality of political science is questionable with respect to ecological thinking, which maintains that ‘scientific research depends on a complex mix of science and nonscience constructs: the selection of topics, problems, theoretical models, methodologies, languages, images, and forms of argument’ (Santos 2014:194; see also Santos et al. 2008:XXVII–XXXIII). This internal plurality is all the more vivid both for political science and for politics. Most importantly, an internal critique to political-colonialism is addressed by intellectuals and civil society engaged in the assessment of liberal representative achievements and failures, and, more specifically, in political crises. The border of internal critique is the limit of abyssal thinking applied to democratic theory. The debate about civil society and its reformative role in the state institution is one such evidence (see above). The political knowledge and experience of social subjectivities, beyond the institutional perimeter of the state and its rigid modernist context, is considered external to the science of politics and to politics itself. The internal pluralism of political science, including Western critical theory, is caged within these limits and to overcome them we need to look beyond this internal plurality towards the political imagination of other civilisational visions (Santos 2014:19–47).

External political knowledge, relates to those concepts of democracy considered unfit for the real challenges of diversity, indigenous peoples, communitarian and consensus democracy (Rivas 2013; Santos 2010c; Villoro 2007; Wiredu 1999, 2007), to name but a few examples. Gandhi’s political thinking is external to the dominant notion of state-centric and strongly representative theory of democracy. It is marginal both in political theory and in politics because it is external to what is considered scientific theory. However, it was formulated internally and is an internal critique of political-colonialism.¹⁵³ Gandhi did not speculate on the realistic feasibility of an alternative structure for a political regime. His *swaraj*

¹⁵³ Gandhi proclaimed that if the Indian were to change the British elite for an Indian one the system of colonisation would not change but remain practically the same. This is an external point of view to the political regime, a direct and heavy critique of political-colonialism as practiced in a colonial empire. It is an external critique if we consider a former colony as external to the democratic regime of the ‘liberal democratic’ polity of the British Empire. An internal critique if we see that the colonial and political cannot be distinguished within the British Empire. However, it is a culturally external critique to democracy if we look at the root on which Gandhi bases his point: he criticises the centralised, industrialised modern state and advocated a different model of state, decentralised and based on a bottom-up scale. Gandhi is therefore both internal and external to modern political science and modern politics.

and *satyagraha* are the ends and means of a concrete, realist alternative. The reason why this knowledge is relevant for the epistemologies of the South is that '[f]or an ecology of knowledges, knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality is the measure of realism, not knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality' (Santos 2014:201). Emerging political movements that take over Gandhi's ideas of decentralisation, self-reliance, and an inter-civilisational approach are external to the scientific and political debate of political theory, and the ecology of knowledge engages with them in order to include them.¹⁵⁴

Santos is straightforward about the need to expand epistemological diversity and to reconsider the perimeter of internal and external fields of science and politics, 'in order to grasp the epistemological diversity of the world, we need not ascribe an absolute value to the distinction between internal and external plurality of knowledges' (Santos 2014:202–3). The renunciation to fullness and completeness opens the epistemology to recognise that 'incommensurability does not necessarily impede communication and may even lead to unsuspected forms of complementarity. [...] The wider the exercise of intercultural translation, the more likely the comparison is to become an internal one' (Santos 2014:203).

Intercultural translation is a procedure struggling against two opposite extremes: universalism and relativism. It makes it possible to translate theories and experiences considered incommensurable using arguments and emotions attaining a non-orthodox intelligibility. It is implemented adopting a diatopical hermeneutics (see also Panikkar 1982, 2000; Santos 2008a):

isomorphic concerns and underlying assumptions among cultures, identifying differences and similarities, and developing, whenever appropriate, new hybrid forms of cultural understanding and intercommunication that may be useful in favouring interactions and

¹⁵⁴ Gandhi is both an internal and external struggler against colonialism and capitalism in a reverse form with respect to political scientific knowledge, as the 'object' self-transforming into the 'subject'. He is internal as an oppressed Indian who, like Ambedkar, Fanon or Mandela, experienced the oppression of colonialism. However, he also frames an external approach due to his education and intercultural combination of thought of the North and of the South, for his position as a privileged caste Hindu, as opposed, for instance, to Untouchables and for his initial vision of imperial belonging by which he fought with in the British army (ambulance corps). Gandhi is neither internal nor external to the North or the South and therefore he is a bridge between the two. Parel (2003:11) maintains that 'the civilization that he sought to build for India was a mixture of both Indian and modern civilizations', including the internal diversity (i.e., Muslim and Hindu) of the Indian one. Pantham (1983:177) underlines that Gandhi 'repaired this modern scientific/positivist divorce of morality from politics' that departs from the philosophical assumption of the state of nature as the state of perpetual war. Democracy for Gandhi is the re-joining of hope with human nature, the construction of a subjectivity from the objectification of colonialism and capitalism.

strengthening alliances among social movements fighting, in different cultural contexts, against capitalism, colonialism, and sexism and for social justice, human dignity, or human decency (Santos 2014:212).

Intercultural translation is the method that allows different opponents of political-colonialism to identify common points of struggle. As such, it is not restricted to the West but embraces those movements and intellectuals struggling all around the world. The subtle nature of political-colonialism and its claimed lack of a credible alternative, implies that most of those oppressed by political-colonialism feel unable to react. The procedure of translation finds a new challenge for itself here: embrace those subjects and subjectivities to make them active, in order to redeem their political involvement from the political lethargy or apathy created by the political-colonial abyssal logic.

The very possibility of translation is based on a very unstable territory. Many perilous questions are raised by intercultural translations, there is no certainty and the political trust acquired by emerging political movements may be easily dispersed. The fundamental question then is: 'how to fight against the abyssal lines using conceptual and political instruments that do not reproduce them?' (Santos 2014:213). Gandhi answered with a civilisational alternative able to tackle the political-colonial logic at the philosophical (non-possession individualism), social (service and duty based democracy) and political (*swaraj* and devolution) level. His idea of *swaraj* and its achievement through *satyagraha* led to an eradication of the root causes. By putting his knowledge into practice with a contemporary political movement it may focus responses in the social or political sphere, while tackling social oppression and elitism. Santos advocates that the richness of democratic practice needs to be protected just as the richness of life on earth does. Therefore, demodiversity is as important as biodiversity, the co-presence of various models and practices of democracy beyond the current leading liberal democratic model (Santos 2006c:40). The philosophical alternative cannot be questioned internally to a civilisational-scientific perspective, at least not without a profound (and utopian) *metanoia* that is opposing the political-colonial regime from within to produce its civilisational change of perspectives (see also Gianolla 2010; Panikkar 1995).

2.3.4 *Experimentalism and the baroque*

The basic critical investigation of the sociology of absences 'starts from two inquiries. The first one questions about the reasons why such a strange and exclusive conception of

totality could have acquired such primacy in the past 200 years', a question that was addressed in the previous chapter. 'The second inquiry aims to identify the ways to confront and overcome such conception of totality as well as the metonymic reason that sustains it' (Santos 2004:167), this is the main research path leading this section. In order to advance in this inquiry the first step is to question the monolithic shield of fatalism surrounding democracy. The main problem is well framed as follows:

Hence, democracy faces limits to the extent of possible economic equality, effective participation, perfect agency, and liberty. But no political system, I believe, can do better. No political system can generate and maintain in modern societies the degree of economic equality that many people in these societies would like to prevail. No political system can make everyone's political participation individually effective. No political system can make governments perfect agents of citizens. [...] Politics, in any form or fashion, has limits in shaping and transforming lives of societies. This is just a fact of life. I believe that it is important to know these limits, so as not to criticize democracy for not achieving what no political arrangement can achieve (Przeworski 2010:16).

Przeworski has liberal democracy in mind when he refers to 'democracy'. The elitist and political-colonialist character of this model is inferred from the role ascribed to the government as 'the agent' of politics that can 'transform lives of societies'. It must be clear by now that the inquiry of this research is less related to what the government can achieve and more related to understanding how the government can engage with society as an agent of politics, with people in society being best positioned to transform their own lives. Other questions arise however, and include: how do we transit from a stable form of (liberal) democracy, which besides its limit is the best known form of government for large scale polities, to a more participatory and people centred form of democracy, where government and sovereign cooperate more closely? How do we put into practice inter-cultural translation? As argued above, there can be no clear or monolithic answers, but practice and experimentalism of political, cultural and civilisational translation suggest that it is possible to overcome what is considered the impassable frontier. This work maintains that the frontier of the liberal representative democratic regime can and shall be surpassed, and it shall be done with respect, but without reverence, for the most robust form of democratic regime in place. To this end, experimentalism is fundamental. Democratic perfection is merely the utopian horizon but democratisation of democracy and the struggle against political-colonialism is the infinite path leading toward that horizon.

Experimentalism requests to face a quest based on less certainty and interrogating assumptions and categories that are in place. Santos maintains that a plurality of subaltern intercultural translations have to have an enrichment of terms and, more importantly, of meanings. These concepts, may have old terms that may be reshaped by the praxes, may change and may subvert their original meaning. Reading Gandhi through the epistemologies of the South implies to defy the indisputability of Western political categories through a process of unlearning (hegemonic categories) and re-learning (counter-hegemonic or subaltern categories). Santos stated that ‘Gandhi symbolizes the most radical rejection of the imperial North in the twentieth century’ and he invites us to think beyond political categories caged in a precise historiographic Western perspective, be it liberal or socialist (Santos 2009). Gandhi claimed for India a proper historiography and a political categorisation consistent with it. He wanted to show that the political rigidity developed in the West through colonialism was questionable and deleterious for the West as well as for India. Santos maintains that Gandhi prospected a path to distance the epistemological perspective from the Western-centric political categories by unlearning the colonial political categories and re-learning from the spirit of humanity that is as ‘old as the hills’. Highlighting the commonalities existing between Gandhi and the struggles to achieve intercultural and pluri-national constitutions by the indigenous peoples of Bolivia and Ecuador, Santos shows that alternative political thinking refers to other categories. He says ‘For someone familiar with Gandhian teachings, there are striking similarities between the concepts of *Sumak Kawsay* and *Pachamama*, on the one hand, and the concepts of *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, *sarvodaya*, on the other. The idea of autonomy and self-government is present in both conceptions’ (Santos 2009). Neither the indigenous people of Latin America nor Gandhi aspire for a new hegemony. This being a point that was made clear by Gandhi himself:

There is no such thing as "Gandhism", and I do not want to leave any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine. I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal truths to our daily life and problems. [...] The opinions I have formed and the conclusions I have arrived at are not final. I may change them tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could do. In doing so I have sometimes erred

and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence (H 28-3-1936).¹⁵⁵

This was Gandhi's opinion on the proposal to systematise his written work in order to create propaganda material on truth and non-violence out of his teachings. Assuming, along with Santos, that there shall be no absolute general theory guiding intercultural political emancipatory processes, but that an ecology of political knowledges shall be at play, the representative austerity of liberal democracy is untenable. With globalisation, the state has lost the monopoly of the regulatory power and the state's institution have diminished their representativeness of societal interests. The state is increasingly one among other actors that regulate social and political life, but it is still the co-ordinating one and, when it enhances democratisation – the state becomes the 'newest social movement' (Santos 2002b:489–93). As such, the state is a battlefield where societal actors – with different visions of political-colonialism and democratisation – compete to reassert their roles on the 'meta-regulation' (still controlled by the state) and the political settlement of the public sphere where the struggle takes place (Santos 2002b:490). Political-colonialism and social fascism are opposed to democratisation and subaltern cosmopolitanism. The state as the newest social movement strengthens forms of participatory democracy. This is an experimental state, a state to be invented between formality and informality, networks, and hybrid forms:

struggle for alternative institutional designs [... which implies that] the state must be transformed into a field of institutional experimentation, allowing for the coexistence of and competition among different institutional solutions, as pilot-experiences, subjected to a permanent scrutiny of citizen collectives charged with the comparative assessment of the performance (Santos 2002b:492).

Santos also argues that as 'the newest social movement' the state must guarantee equal opportunities to different democratic proposals and experiences, coherently, with their own democratic perspectives, and provide 'basic standards of inclusion' to be evaluated by citizens and their participation. Since the root causes of the fragmentation of the state's power are not solely domestic, so too then does the response require a subaltern cosmopolitan

¹⁵⁵ This text is quoted directly from *Harijan* journal where it is cited by Mahadev Desai into an editorial article. The same text is slightly different in the translation (Hindi into English) published in the CWMG (Vol. 62 pp. 223-4) under the title 'Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting-III'. The four 'Gandhis' identified by Ashis Nandy (2000) after the death of the Mahatma show that indeed it is misleading to identify something as 'Gandhism', either in India or at global level.

approach. This response needs openness to demodiversity as elaborated through the ecological, inter-cultural and inter-civilisational, vision of democratisation expounded above. In this context, the category of the 'baroque' needs to be briefly analysed as another actor of democratisation (Santos 1995:499–506, 2014:56–64).

The baroque emerges in times of paradigmatic transition in search for a new common sense. It is an 'eccentric form of modernity', is political imagination emerging from the centrifugal forces produced by Western modernity, and is 'the South of the North, so to speak' (Santos 2014:57). It emerges as a response to the state's power feebleness, as for example, in Latin America it was related to the weakness of the colonisers, 'it occurred in countries and historical moments in which the centre of power was weak and tried to hide its weakness by dramatizing conformist sociability' (*ibidem*). It is characterised by 'open-ended and unfinished character that allows for the autonomy and creativity of the margins and peripheries' (Santos 2014:57). The baroque is instable and surprising social and political imagination, is based on the transitory and on the local. It looks for heterotopia beyond the failure of Western modernity through reflexivity and surprise producing an open ended sociability. We can conceive 'the baroque, as a subaltern ethos of western modernity;' (Santos 2010b:231). The baroque is open to the ecological thinking characterised by blurring borders (*sfumato*) among different knowledge at the margin of the mainstream: '[s]fumato allows baroque subjectivity to create the near and the familiar among different intelligibilities, thus making cross-cultural dialogues possible and desirable' (Santos 2014:59). But it can also produce new logics in the form of *mestizaje* which 'operates through the creation of new constellations of meaning, which are truly unrecognizable or blasphemous in light of their constitutive fragments' (*ibidem*). The baroque is a logic of subaltern cosmopolitanism and the logic that leads the reinvention of political theory.

Can Gandhi's civilisational democratisation be considered a baroque *mestizaje*? It is a *mestizaje* of Hindu and Western philosophy based on the revitalisation of epic symbolism, proved extremely surprising and produced instability in the empire. However, it did not emerge as a mere response to the weakness of central power, but rather, it shacked imperial power in such a radical form that it produced a weakness. Gandhi's *mestizaje* was characterised by internal and external instability in the constant bargaining with the British

but also with Hindus, Muslims, *Dalits* and others. Gandhi's democratisation is a prospect of horizontality, both mythical and symbolic, and it may be incorporated only with a thick zone of *sfumato* touching a great number of margins produced by the centrifugal force generated by political-colonialism of contemporary time.

2.3.5 *Baroque, paradigmatic transitions and carnival*

The correlation between Gandhi's and Gandhian democratisation, which between the political evolutions worked out by Gandhi and by the followers of his ideas, is an untraceable link. Below, I assess the potential of party-movements as a category of social actors that oppose the political system but engage within it, as they are centrifugal forces of change. To better understand the political-sociological meaning of party-movements in relation to the theoretical framework proposed here, it is helpful to engage with the *topoi* of baroque and carnival.

As the form of the baroque, party-movements engage with an alternative to the liberal democratic paradigm, and portray a new inspiring political imagination that includes the subversion of the customary forms of making politics, and they bring novelty and serendipity which needs to be disclosed. However, while the baroque discourse of paradigmatic change takes place, party-movements are caught in the logic of carnival, being part of a system that they want to change.

Interpreting Bakhtin's analysis of 'carnivalised literature', political-colonialism is an epic piece of theory with the centrality of heroic figures (the political elite), while party-movements may represent the political style of the novel with its 'carnavalesque' characteristic that questions stability and reverses power structures (Bakhtin 1994). Bakhtin envisages a conflict between two opposed forces: centripetal and centrifugal. The 'centripetal force permeates the entire system of language and forces it towards unification and standardization' (Lachmann 1988:116). The centrifugal is the subversion (although temporary in social representation), of such logic and is represented by carnival literature championed by renaissance author François Rabelais. This is carnivalesque literature, and it combines humanism and folk culture. This metaphor is all the more relevant for the political analysis of party-movements with their attempt to combine representation, participation, the

mainstream (humanist) understanding of democracy and the folk (populist-popular) aspiration to change verticality of power into horizontality of power sharing.

Carnival is a bodily practice that extolls the physical materiality and exposes the body to the grotesque, ridiculing the mediaeval religious otherworldly conception of life and celebrating the body and its social infinitude. In fact, the grotesque of carnivalised bodies in the social dimension establishes a continuity between life and death, as bodies are ontologically equal, connected and vulnerable. In carnival 'by ridiculing death and finiteness, folk culture, which is the bearer of this revelation, embodies the refusal to acknowledge the authority of those official institutions which, by taking death and the end into their calculations, seek to exert and extend their hegemony' (Lachmann et al., 1988 p. 124).

The grotesque representation breaks the rule of vertical authority, opening up to horizontality thereby representing a constant possibility to subvert the paradigmatic social order, and it is to this extent that it is utopian. Carnival 'can be seen as yet another term for a social centrifugal force which opposes the centralizing imposition of the monologic word' (Morris 1994:21).

The monologic world of the authority parallel the monoculture of the 'abyssal thinking' and carnival parallels the three *topoi* from which an alternative subjectivity shall struggle in the competition for paradigmatic change in view of a post-abyssal thinking, 'frontier', 'baroque', or the 'South' (Santos 1995:489–519). However, while carnival is not mobilised as a form of paradigmatic transition, the baroque has such potential and the party-movements engage with the dualism of permanence and change, carnival and baroque, both centrifugal forces but with different political potentialities.

The 'principle of laughter that organizes the carnival is transtemporal and universal. Laughter rises above and transcends the objects at which it is temporarily aimed: official institutions and the sacral' (Lachmann 1988:123). Carnival opens up from monoculture to ambivalence 'between the unofficial culture of laughter and the official culture of order thus appears to be one between a culture of ambivalence and a culture of monovalence. [...] In the carnival, dogma, hegemony, and authority are dispersed through ridicule and laughter' (Lachmann 1988:130). The grotesque of the carnival is the temporary victory over the threat

of death that is the hilt of power of the authority. Laughter is the winning instrument against death and the power that uses death as thread for hegemonic control. The grotesque is the subversion of the political order achieved with a temporary exposition of its controversial character, however, it remains an exposure unable to achieve paradigmatic change. Laughter is part of the paradigm and, to some extent, it helps the paradigm to last being its safety valve. To the power of the state, folk culture opposes the non-violent power of laughter:

The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation. These elements prevailed in the Middle Ages. Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority (Bakhtin 1994:90).

Non-violence is present in the laughter and the grotesque of the carnival, and its uninterrupted relation between life and death resounds with Gandhi's non-violence, ready to loose oneself but not to let truth die. There are however two radical differences. The grotesque is a materialist dimension of ambivalence for the established authority based on the universality of laughter and misrecognition of truth, while Gandhi's *satyagraha* is based on the spiritual dimension of the highest moral end, which is truth, and targets authority with its own authority. Gandhi's truth is a superior principle with respect to established authority; on the contrary, laughter exposes established authority to the grotesque but without challenging the authority. From these differences, the civilisational democratic perspective by Gandhi envisaged an alternative to liberal democratic regimes, as to any authoritarian regime, or regime dominated by political-colonialism. Bakhtin's carnival instead is a momentary subversion of an established (authoritarian or liberal democratic political-colonial) authority. Carnival is not oriented towards the one truth, but toward the radicalisation of ambivalence, the radical but transitory and cyclical critique of established authority. To this extent both, Gandhi's *satyagraha* and Santos' baroque exceed potentialities inscribed in the carnival by Bakhtin. While the carnival is one exception¹⁵⁶ that is accepted and even participated in by the authority, *satyagraha* and baroque are the *topoi* to create an alternative to the authority and its paradigm. Incidentally, in the Christian calendar carnival ends when the fast (lent time)

¹⁵⁶ Bakhtin writes: '[w]hile carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit: it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part' (Bakhtin 1994:7). And also 'carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life' (Bakhtin 1994:8).

starts – confirming the temporality of the carnivalesque exception reconnected to the established order by the austerity of fasting time. With Gandhi, fasting was instead the deepest moment of rupture, as in *satyagraha* it is the last stage of subversive political action where the subject puts her own existence in question in order to achieve a socio-political change oriented to attain truth.

The dialectic between fear and laughter – the authority and carnival – is the paradigm that the baroque overcomes with the eccentric search for a new paradigm. The search for a new paradigm to political-colonialism implies a radical shift of the political abyssal line, what amounts to a tectonic movement. Carnavalesque politics *per se* does not have an impact to the substantial shift of the political abyssal line. Party-movements tend to remain in ambivalence, even if with different styles, they engage in both a baroque and carnival dimension. Advocating a paradigmatic change – and a radical shift of the political abyssal line, they engage with the baroque, but as they institutionalise and enter the interplay of parliamentary politics and the electoral market, they fall into carnival ambivalence.

The application of the carnival to India needs to undergo further scrutiny because it is a Western-centric category based on Christianity. Indeed, India offers a version of permanent carnival as a pluralism that goes beyond assimilation, conversion, reduction and mixture, and to this extent India is far more radically democratic than Western regimes.

[W]hat India can offer is the carnival of its “confusions”, which represents a different order of pluralism, crossing assimilation, conversion, reduction, confusion and mixture. India, as a new provider of ideas where any of them dies and all become compost, offers a new intellectual common good of experiences and heuristics (Visvanathan 2009:504).

The permanent carnival of India underlies the importance of the global South-North comparison. While democracy is a socio anthropological human pattern, exclusions from democracy remain empirically linked to the concreteness of the territory where democracy is implemented. Theories developed in one part of the world can contribute to general reflections, but they are arguably capable of providing a concrete contribution to the involvement of the local ‘people’. Likewise, they can only marginally contribute to the disqualification of general procedures that emerge in concrete contexts. India’s political regime, with its permanent carnival, experiences a pluralism that the standardisation features of liberal democracy fails to value. One can explore the richness of India’s democracy only if

one is able to penetrate the richness of subaltern practices, ideas, and theories of democracy that constitute the mixed political regime of different Indian peoples. This richness also encompasses a plurality of forms of oppressions which penetrate emerging socio-political forces (as will be touched upon later), the AAP and the M5S party-movements serving as an example. Qualification and disqualification of party-movements is far too easy if critical reading amplifies their weaknesses and allows for the downplaying of their emancipatory potential. In the North as in the South, the struggle for paradigmatic change against political-colonialism is a matter far too complex to expect full success before acknowledging perspective change. Party-movements, as carnivalesque as they may be, with the laughter they inspire, open up a space of reflection to think about democratisation which deserves critical scrutiny. This is what we are about to engage with.

Part Two: Research rationale, methodology and contexts

3 On the experience of developing the methods and methodology

This chapter explains the methodological choices, the perspectives and challenges that these choices imply, and the way the methodology has been implemented for the concretisation of the research presented in this study.

I cannot escape the reflexive considerations related to the fact that I was part of the research, with a body that gave me strengths and weaknesses, and with me as a subjectivity immersed in the social relations that characterised the research. Both, body and relations marked the rhythm of the work that took place in the field and while sitting in front of the drafting desk. The relation of the body and personal relations within the research is an inescapable question that I feel compelled to ask while conducting the research. The quality, intensity, extension and achievement of the study depend enormously on body posture and performance. No matter how abstract the research topic, how sedentary the work of analysis, and how difficult it is to attain the research objective, this is a central issue.

The following sections start off with a contextualisation of the methodological options from the chosen theoretical perspective in relation to the choices made in the implementation. Following this, is an elaboration of the implementation of the methodology used in India (January-April 2014) and in Italy (January-July 2015). Lastly, I make a number of comments and considerations concerning the experience gained throughout the research.

During the course of the research, the three phases of preparation, implementation and analysis were not carried out sequentially. For instance, part of the preparation for the fieldwork in Italy occurred after the fieldwork in India and an initial approach to the analysis occurred before and during both the fieldwork in India and in Italy. The research was not carried out following a rigid structural succession of calendar outlined activities. This was especially due to the extreme dynamism of the two case studies selected, the AAP and the M5S, which demanded constant dialogue between the theoretical and methodological premises and the empirical and analytical work, as is argued below.

3.1 Overall methodological approach

Possessing a philosophy background, I feel that in this study I have learned a lot with respect to social science methodology. This field of knowledge and knowledge-production has

given me much insight during the research. In this chapter, I provide an account of this learning process and the way it has substantiated my research.

Despite the value of the methodology that I used, it left me constantly feeling a high degree of uncertainty and vagueness. This is because it is an extremely reflexive part of the research where the posture, skills, experience, entrepreneurship and other characteristics of the researcher, combined with different methodological options and an unpredictable flow of the events (replete with opportunities and obstacles) mark the quality of the work.

I offer a clarification for the dialectic between the rigour of science and the ambiguity of the fieldwork that I experienced. I do this in order to provide a clear picture of the scientific work that I carried out throughout my human and relational ontology as a person. To say it in another way, I could carry on my whole research again and come to a different outcome. This is due to three parallel dynamisms: the first is personal development (including my control of theory and methodology); the second is the ever-changing reality of the field subjectivities, including those studied and my own;¹⁵⁷ and third, is a proper of my understanding of the research and methodology. These are characterised by interactions between various subjectivities, those of the research participants. This interaction can obviously not be crystallised and enjoys its own dynamism. With these variants, a range of possible methodological choices would deliver different scientific research results. In this section I account for the preferred options and actions in order to give the reader an understanding of the conditions of the scientific work. As it may already be clear, I used qualitative methodology.

3.1.1 *Reflexive rearguard social science*

I made a great effort to learn about methodology both in elaborating on the research proposal and in preparing for the fieldwork. This is especially true with respect to the research conducted in India, because it took place earlier and was culturally challenging. In this study, mainstream scholarship was engaged with (Bryman 2012; Dijk 1993, 2005; Hardy and Bryman 2009; Mahoney 2007; Wodak and Meyer 2009), as was the reflexive experiences of scholars,

¹⁵⁷ Human beings are relational, dialogical subjectivities constituted by the 'word', the subjectivity is ontologically open to the world and characterised by her interaction with it (Baccarini 2002; Buber 1997; see also Gianolla 2010:275–90, 2012).

many of whom are influencing or leading the Coimbra school of social sciences (Burawoy 1998; Fals Borda 1988; Mendes 1999:137–81, 2003b; Meneses 2003; Santos 1995:125–249).

I translated reflexive science into experience and praxis in this study as it became a source of inspirational reference for me, especially during moments of distress in the field, or when faced with the challenge of analysis. This was also true for when I felt apprehensive about translating the reflexive evidence emerging from fieldwork into sound and robust empirical findings for the research. Indeed, translation and dialogue are fundamental elements of this kind of science: '[r]eflexive science starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself' (Burawoy 1998:5). In this study, through reflexive science, I embraced the action-research paradigm, something that is well explained in the 'Manifesto for Intellectual-Activists' (Santos 2014:3–17). This paradigm centres on what Santos calls the 'rearguard theory', a theoretical approach that expects serendipity and engages with intellectual activism:

theoretical work that follows and shares the practices of the social movements very closely, raising questions, establishing synchronic and diachronic comparisons, symbolically enlarging such practices by means of articulations, translations, and possible alliances with other movements, providing contexts, clarifying or dismantling normative injunctions, facilitating interaction with those who walk more slowly, and bringing in complexity when actions seem rushed and unreflective and simplicity when action seems self-paralyzed by reflection. The grounding ideas of a rearguard theory are craftsmanship rather than architecture, committed testimony rather than clairvoyant leadership, and intercultural approximation to what is new for some and very old for others (Santos 2014:44).

Utilising this point of view, I adopt the term 'research participants' to mean the activists, politicians, academics and others who I interacted with in the field and in interviews.¹⁵⁸ Regardless of the support or opposition of research participants to the political

¹⁵⁸ Some of the research participants interacted only during a single interview. This is especially the case of some academics, representatives and national leaders. However, at the grassroots, I experienced higher degree of personal interaction among all research participants at all levels as the participants were aware of my research and they demanded that a relationship (including complicity) be established. Most of the time the treatment I received was overwhelming, as participants felt inclined to offer a return for such a dialogical approach. This occurred because of the combination of participant observation and interview methods. Only in a limited number cases was the meeting zone with the research participants restricted to a rushed and 'cold' interview, which would justify the use of the term 'respondent' as oppose to 'research participant'. For overall consistency, I retained the latter term and discharge the former definition.

and social struggles of the movements that I studied in this project, all of them contributed to provide a critical and reflexive understanding of these struggles and movements.

The adoption of this approach is justified for various reasons. Firstly, I am enthusiastic,¹⁵⁹ engaged with the topic of research, and I am willing to contribute to the cause of democratisation of democracy and to the struggle against political-colonialism. This is the case in terms of research, as well as with concrete actions via activism that emerged during the research period and has continued beyond it. The second reason for the adoption of an action-research approach is that the case studies chosen here are hypothetically characterised by a counter-hegemonic approach that could only be analysed with a serious commitment within their structure and with their struggles. The cases that are presented in this study demand a bottom-up approach that can best be achieved through active engagement without having to prescind from the positioned objectivity based on the theoretical framework. This approach makes the analysis more mature as it maintains an awareness of its equally positioned standpoint. The third reason for the action-research approach (below) relates to the commitment of exploring and expanding the application of the epistemologies of the South. This approach implies a basic humbleness and refrain by the research with respect to instrumental intentions (understood as the exploration of the case studies to 'extract' information from the field).

I am aware that I can more consistently understand the complexity of the social dimensions of the study through an engagement with the subjectivities participating in the research. In other words, I co-participated in the research as did the activists, politicians and scholars¹⁶⁰ who were met in the field and contributed to the research outcome. This also

¹⁵⁹ Enthusiasm has been a key feature without which it would not have been possible to carry out the research work, as it has been a source of strength. The hypothesis of the work changed along the course of this study, and with it, matured the form of my enthusiasm for conducting the research. Therefore, while my commitment to democratisation remained unchanged and unchallenged by the successes and failures observed in the field, I matured along the way the ability to think and codify political and social paths for achieving that process. The result is a sophistication of the theory and the radicalisation of the critical stance of the cases studied.

¹⁶⁰ Incidentally, I had an experience of reflexive science when Manuela Serra, Ph. D. researcher in Sociology at Sapienza University of Rome, asked me to be interviewed (in Vienna on 13 July 2016 in the occasion of the Forum of Sociology of the International Sociological Association). For the first time I was on the other side of the voice recorder and I had the sensation of a conversation. I had this experience when I was making and asking the questions. The only difference I could experience was the leading role of the conversation, while in

signifies that the research here is a research done ‘with’ the AAP and the M5S members and is not one done ‘on’ them. The kind of relationships established between participants is of a subject-subject nature as opposed to a subject-object type. The action research method is a privileged approach that allows this to happen.

3.1.2 *Comparative approach*

Deciding to study a political phenomenon implies a renunciation of the punctual description of an analytical model, and includes a description and an explanation based on a theory. These may be classified and categorised, as for example, the definition of ‘party-movement’ is one such category. These, however are not inscribable in a verifiable methodological approach, in which having a certain number of conditions a series of consequences would follow. Therefore, the social scientist must not simply describe social reality (this is perhaps the work of historians). Rather, they must also provide an explanation which can be verified with the application to more cases (Palano 2012). Adopted here is the comparative approach used as a prerequisite of the methodology one that has been increasingly used since the 1970s (see for instance Lijphart 1971; Sartori 2005 [1976]) and the extended case study as a reference for the inductive methodology. This was used to conform with the praxis of political comparative analysts that ‘usually combine different elements of diverse research orientations to formulate their theories’ (Mahoney 2007:124). In this study, it was paramount to combine the methodology with a strong sociological account.

Comparative cases may be selected for their concordances in order to identify differences or vice versa and to analyse heterogeneous phenomena in order to identify commonalities (Palano 2012:66–67). The cases adopted in this research present several common characteristics and a number of differences. I believed that this mixture of homogeneity and heterogeneity made them interesting and demanding for the comparison because they did not fall in any of the comparative paradigms listed above. While homogeneity stresses reliability, heterogeneity generates instability (Mahoney 2007:130), a combination that here fosters critical analysis. For each of the cases in this study, I adopted an extended case study approach (Burawoy 1991, 1998). Such an approach is reflexive and is

both cases the flow of thought ran free, and while being interviewed I had no preoccupation to engage the talk with other topics that could be of relevance or could have a profitable response.

committed to the cases as it aims at unveiling power dynamics by scaling up the analysis from the micro to explain the macro.¹⁶¹ The '[r]eflexive science insists, therefore, on studying the everyday world from the standpoint of its structuration, that is by regarding it as simultaneously shaped by and shaping an external field of forces' (Burawoy 1998:15).

Examining both Burawoy's extended case study approach and Ragin's (1987) comparative approach, Mendes (2003b) lists the advantages and disadvantages of adopting such an approach and a comparative methodology. The main disadvantages are the power relations existing between the researcher and the research participants and the discretion of the researcher in adopting – and therefore silencing – determined aspects of people's lives. The advantages are numerous, starting with the irrelevance of case frequency – something fundamental when dealing with just two cases. This methodology allows the realisation of holistic analysis and for working with cases at the micro level but scaling up their contextual validity to the global level.¹⁶² It does so by accounting for conjectural causality so that the analysis allows one to study 'constellation and configurations of facts' (Mendes 2003b:3). The comparative approach focuses on the cause-effect relation as emerging from the empirical finding (Ragin 1987, 52). Moreover, this methodology accounts for external forces that influence the analytical field, as well as for strong inductive structuration of theory on the base of concrete contextual empirical evidence compared to statistics (see also Mahoney 2007). In summary, this approach is very well suited for intercultural translation and the adoption of reciprocity during field research, as Mendes maintains when referring to Marcus (1998:80–133). In this study, during the macro analysis of the data collected, a micro evidence generalisation was done. I carried this out without intending to generate a neutral or monolithic reading of the cases studied and their democratic potential. Rather, I carried this research out in coherence with the theoretical framework elaborated on the first part of this work, in order to provide a contextualised and scalable understanding of the cases.

¹⁶¹ This is achievable assuming that a 'social situation becomes a social process because social action presupposes and reproduces its regime of power' (Burawoy 1998:18).

¹⁶² The relation between local and global and the multiple relations between state and non-state actors is well explored by Meneses (2003) whom provides a rich picture of the very delicate (dis)equilibrium of forces. Although my research faces a lesser degree of complexity due to the different nature of the inquiry, I believe that conflicting notions and perspectives of democracy were particularly relevant conjugating the local and national discourse of the party-movements at stake, something which I accounted for in the empirical chapters.

I chose to conduct the fieldwork in the equally peripheral cities of Jaipur and Latina. In Jaipur, there was a rising cluster of activists that were constructing the AAP presence in the town, differently than in Delhi where the party-movement was already established. In Latina, there already existed a provincial cluster of the M5S. Both places were located a relatively close distance from the capital cities that represented the main hub of both party-movements. In the case of the M5S, Milan is certainly a very important place but after the 2013 elections, it seems that Rome is prevailing¹⁶³. I opted for Jaipur and Latina in order to observe the periphery of these peripheral party-movements of liberal democratic regimes. I made this choice in order to have a more radical picture of the movement at the grassroots level, so that it could then be combined with the central discourse of the party-movements, especially by means of interviews.

There existed research benefits stemming from the actual time frame of the two fieldwork periods. In both cases, the fieldwork involved a very decisive timeframe. In the case of the AAP, the party-movement was at its peak in terms of popularity, having just formed its first government in Delhi and having made a first attempt at institutionalisation, in what was a period full of evidence, enthusiasm and delusion. In the case of the M5S, I initiated the ethnography when the local group of the city of Latina split and entered into conflicting dynamics that contributed elements to the analysis. At the national level, the political dynamism started with the electoral success of the M5S in 2012 and 2013 continued with a number of decisions that occurred between the end of 2014 and 2015.

While I provide a detailed analysis of these events in the empirical chapter, I experienced a degree of fortune to have encountered such a degree of specificity and richness of events within the timeframes of the fieldwork periods (which were not symmetrical). A note of caution is necessary, however – but not in detriment – in light of the comparative approach. The AAP and the M5S both have undergone a period of aftershock following the electoral victories but they took different latencies. In the case of the AAP the most significant internal conflict occurred in 2015 with the Bhushan-Yadav case, examined in this study via a critical

¹⁶³ I tried in different forms to have a meeting with Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio but I was unsuccessful. I received the straightest response via email from the communication department of the M5S at the senate, it reads 'I am sorry but they are not available for interviews. Thanks' (email communication of 14 March 2015), I was perplexed.

analysis of the events done through a combination of elements collected during the fieldwork and with support of the press. On one hand, I minimise the effect of this asymmetry in the analysis, on the other hand, this example illustrates the methodological challenge of the comparison. In other words, beyond other cultural and socially related components, the comparison faced the following challenges: understanding the two party-movements in a timeframe which was not symmetrical, and analysing similar issues among the two cases that were scattered beyond the fieldwork time frame. This is one of the reasons why an intense use of the media, combined with facts, contributed to the argument. This included filling the gap between facts gathered during the fieldwork period and facts gathered outside of it. This last consideration extends beyond the specificity of the two fieldwork periods as it involved comparing the two party-movements in the whole cycle of liberal democratic regimes. It would demand a longer commitment (although not necessarily symmetrical or contemporary) – in order to observe the party-movements from their ‘nascent state’ (Alberoni 2014), that is, from their first campaign (and then other successive campaigns), while acting as opposition and while acting as government. This kind of a more articulated research, however, would not guarantee that the two party-movements maintain the hypothetical characteristics that make them relevant for the study.

In both cases, the fieldwork was extremely productive and I was prepared to recognise that the resulting evidence would not be superimposable. The findings are appropriate for the objective of the research, the kind of fieldwork experience and the researcher’s background. The reasons for the lack of symmetry are equally due to these. There were a number of other differences in implementation in the two different fieldwork periods. Firstly, these differences are due to my familiarity with the field. It was my first experience in India and I had to create a network of confidence regardless of the constraints of language, culture, time and workload.

I spent a longer time period in Italy due to the co-tutelage agreement between the University of Coimbra and Sapienza University of Rome. Italy also possessed a familiar cultural and linguistic environment, one that allowed me to easily become more familiar with the research participants. It was necessary to structure a network of contacts, as well as familiarise

myself with the M5S activists and with the academic environment of the (Sapienza) University, tasks which proved easier to execute in Italy than in India.

Moreover, in India there were two research focuses: Gandhi and the AAP. While I participated in the AAP's activities and interviewed the AAP's activists, I also was penetrating the Gandhian network of contacts, related movements and activists. Finally, due to speaking the language, in Italy it was possible to actively participate in the M5S meetings, while in India it was only possible partially to follow the activities of the AAP. As a result, the kind of evidence that I gathered from participant observation in Italy was more detailed than that which I collected in India.

These are partially the reasons why the two empirical chapters provide different angles of analysis. The AAP chapter enjoys the fresh perspective of a new comer to India who was welcomed and introduced to the social challenges of the Gandhians and the AAP activists. The interviews acted as a cornerstone of the research while observation provided an orientation between interviews. In Italy I was able to have research participants acknowledge me as a sympathiser of the M5S before being known as a researcher to them, solely due to the fact that I am Italian. At Sapienza University, apart from bureaucratic delays, I could slowly enter in the academic environment that provided a stimulating space for reflection. In such a context observation was able to guide the analysis while interviews reinforced the evidence that was emerging from active participation in both the movement's activities and those of the academic world.

3.1.3 *Keys and methods*

Research commenced with an intense literature review in Coimbra, as the search and study of literature occurred throughout the course of the entire study, including in India and Italy. The review covered topics related to the theoretical part of the work as well as the historical, social and political context in both countries related to the study.

The preparation of fieldwork included the creation of contacts that required networking with stakeholders and informed persons (i.e., contacts in the field, scholars and activists). Below I give an account of the reasons and rationale for the selection of the case studies, while in this section I explain the methods and instruments adopted.

Underlining the methodology are four criteria and four methods or tools. Listed below are the criteria followed by the methods. The first criterion was 'creativity' as a quality to achieve a 'learned ignorance' that is proper to the epistemologies of the South and which has a special focus on the sociology of emergences with the participants in the field. This kind of creativity implies a certain humble approach, which is the awareness to be ignorant, and the existential perception that the possibility to learn is never exhausted. Therefore, ignorance is always to be overcome by further learning and new perspectives to be tested.

Creativity refers to the fact that beyond document analysis, workshops, participant observation, personal notes and interviews, the research engaged in a day-by-day search for not only sources of information but also for understanding that was discovered through the participant approach with research participants in the field. Encounters, relationships, observations and conversations were part of a process aimed at digging into the unwritten or unknown laws, conventions and customs. To practice research creativity and co-creativity, I adopted experimental methods, as for instance, the creative workshops as elucidated below.

The second key criterion of the methodology is inter-subjectivity. The core of the research was the presence of the subjects as opposed to the objectification of the subjects. The relationships developed through the fieldwork were of a subject-to-subject non-instrumental kind. The testimony brought in through biographies, activism, co-participation, co-creation (of the researcher) and other participations in the field was a consistent part of the on-going co-learning process. This is as Inter-subjectivity is based on a dialogical approach that is best implemented into the action-research approach (Fals Borda 1988).

The third key criterion of the methodology is critical assessment. The research implied a critical analysis and approached it with the awareness of a positioned (although dynamic) standpoint and ignorance. I am aware of the fact that my position in the research group (while in the field) is affected by, and influences, the actions carried on during the research. Consequently, a critical assessment of the knowledge gained or produced during the research had been a constant element that required verification and renovation in order to strengthen the research approach. In the framework of this critical approach, this criterion implies that the self-critique precede the critique.

The fourth key criterion of the methodology is organisation. The complexity and ambition of the subject of the research, its logistics and the comparative approach all required a consistent effort to systematise the data collected throughout the research. I carried out this exercise in a three step systematisation approach: before, during and after the fieldwork. Before the fieldwork, I established the methods for collecting and organising the data (including selecting the appropriate software and hardware): during fieldwork and document analysis, data was collected, codified and, as far as possible, systematised. After the fieldwork, I accomplished the final systematisation of the data to grant consistency and indexation and to allow for a fast identification of data needed in the assortment of data collected. During the analysis, I tried to maximize the amount of data used (although a level of dispersion was inevitable), and to some extent necessary, to optimise the conceptualisations emerging from the research.

There were four methods used to achieve the four key methodological criteria. First of all was the specific use of most of the sociological instruments of the epistemologies of the South. I made special use of intercultural translation, ecological thinking, sociology of absences, sociology of emergences, demodiversity and the methodology used in the workshops of the Popular University of Social Movements (UPMS) (Santos 2006a, 2014; UPMS 2015).

The second method, informed by the work of Elsa Lechner (2012), concerned biographical workshops, focusing on the different moments of co-learning and thereby elaborated on writing, listening, resonance, sharing and socialization.

The third method used referred to creative analysis (Taylor and Szteiter 2011) and creative-stimulating exercises such as freewriting, check-in, dialogue process, writing to gather thoughts, and closing circles (sharing). Through these methods I developed the format of the creative workshops as it was based on an ad-hoc methodology which combined different elements.

The final method used was software indexing, as software was used to support systematisation of information including: mind mapping, bibliographical references, word processing, audio transcription assistant, Computer Assisted Quality Data Analysis (CAQDA)

and videoconferencing. The software I adopted included Freemind, Zotero, Microsoft Office, Apache Openoffice, F4, MAXQDA and Skype.

The methods utilised in the collection of data included semi-structured interviews, creative workshops, participant observation and documental research. I refer to this ensemble of methods as ethnography and I dedicate a specific account of the implementation of the methods for each of the case studies.

3.1.4 Sampling

I carried out the sampling of the research participants using mix methods. In India, I started with the initial contact with the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj (KIGS) who then provided me with a number of contacts ranging from Gandhian activists on to academics. Both Amit Kumar and Awadh Prasad had been extremely helpful in this phase. With the support of KIGS it was possible to gain access to contacts who are renowned social activists. For some of these, I established a long exchange of emails during the weeks of fieldwork and only after many attempts to arrange everything and make it happen did the meetings occur. Some of those interviewed live in other Indian states and I had a degree of fortune to be able to arrange such a large number of contacts in a relatively short period of time. Despite this, however, other meetings could not happen and other excellent activists and scholars had to remain silent in this research.

Concerning the AAP, while preparing the fieldwork in the months before the trip I communicated with the Rajasthan State Office that granted contact with one of their local leaders. I visited the office on the third day of having been in town and it was possible from that point on to engage in a cooperation that would continue throughout the fieldwork period. After participating in the AAP's activities for a couple of weeks, I identified some of the activists and leaders that I wished to interview, only a few of them declined. I encouraged the AAP leaders in Jaipur to help facilitate and arrange meetings with the national leaders in Delhi, however this did not work out as I hoped because the AAP was in state of turmoil at the time of my arrival in the capital city. Before arriving I contacted a number of national leaders via email, only two of these contacts delivered an interview, while the others agreed to schedule a meeting but then declined at the last minute. For others, it was necessary to simply show up at the AAP office, or, in the case of Kejriwal, to be present for a couple of days in the early

morning hours outside of his personal residence where he meets people for short informal talks.

The sampling for the workshop was completed a couple of weeks after the participant observation took place in the AAP office in Jaipur. I invited the AAP activists that appeared to potentially be more interested to the event as I thought they could bring more dynamics to the workshop. I contacted approximately a dozen of them, of which about half could not attend, while other interested activists spontaneously applied. The second workshop took place at Rajasthan University and was co-organised with the Centre for Gandhian Studies (CGS). The sampling had to be open, and there was a high number of participants due to the fact that it was an institutional activity prepared on the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination.

In Italy, the sampling of research participants invited to interview started after a number of weeks in the field. Having more time with respect to India, it was preferred to identify the activists that, for a number of different reasons, could be more relevant for the research before inviting them to the interviews. Apart from the activists of Latina, I interviewed another six activists from other cities due a number of different reasons. These activists tended to have a critical stance on the M5S, and I contacted them through the internet, social networks or the press. They were interviewed either via skype calls or in person. Participation in an event such as the national meeting 'five star Italy' (*Italia 5 Stelle*, Rome – 10-12 October 2014) was a very important occasion that allowed for the establishing of direct contact with representatives and activists from other cities.

I invited all the activists of the meetup group 256 to participate in a creative workshop organised with the M5S activists. Likewise, I invited all the students and researchers of the 'Political Studies' programme network to participate in two creative workshops organised at Sapienza University.

I adopted 'chain referral sample' or 'snowballing' (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) almost exclusively for the national representatives of both the AAP and the M5S, although for the latter it worked much better than for the former. Having a personal contact with one representative or leader made it easier for others to welcome a request for an interview.

3.1.5 Critical approach, context and the media

Wodak and Meyer (2009:5–6) maintain that critical discourse analysis understands language as social practice and therefore reaffirms the paramount importance of the context of language use. The main challenge in collecting and analysing data was the fact that the data was constantly changing while being studied. This is due to two important and different factors. On one hand, both the AAP and the M5S are still in the making in terms of finding meaning, structuring and consolidating as political forces. Their political forms are not yet crystallised and they sediment just as much as they respond to the political challenges that they face. On the other hand, both the AAP and the M5S are experimental in that they do not apply a defined ideology to political challenges, but rather, they define their own political line in response to those challenges.

Although the analysis refers especially to the fieldwork time frames (January – April 2014 for India and January – July 2015 for Italy), it is not meant to be a static picture of these two parties in these two timeframes. As explained above, the partial extension of the analysis beyond the two fieldwork timeframes is important in order to understand the two parties in the complex dynamic of their discourses. Moreover, the extension of the discourses of these parties cannot exclude the press through which they deliver their main message.

In order to respond to these challenges and to refer to a longer timeframe than that which was used in the fieldwork, I made the decision to incorporate a systematic use of press publications (mainly, but not restricted to 'The Hindu' and 'Hindustan Time' in India and '*Fatto Quotidiano*' and '*Repubblica*' in Italy), magazines, online webpages, videos and blogs. I archived all of these sources using the software Zotero. I scrutinised the data collected (to its source) and added these to the database articles. If these manifested pertinence and accuracy (but of course not necessarily compliance) with an intertwined appreciation of the facts compared to other sources, they were utilised. I have written with caution regarding the concerns of these media and I have presented from a reflexive standpoint and in accordance with the theoretical framework of the research. Thus, they maintain a close link with the context as part of the discursive formation.

In the press, both the AAP and the M5S are scrutinised with clamour and criticism. By referring to the press in relation to the data collected, I am aware that I would support the

evidence with a sided political narrative, and, it is for this reason, that I do not uptake the press narratives. In this framework the importance of being objective and not neutral (Santos 2014:201, 207) is paramount. A systematic analysis of the press concerning the specific features of the case studies would return a biased outcome. As van Dijk clarifies some of the reasons, proper to the production of news, for this bias,

News is not simply an (incomplete) description of the facts, but a specific kind of (re)construction of reality according to the norms and values of some society. [...] media discourse should not be seen merely as a ready “product” of news-gathering activities, but as the manifestation of a complex process in which knowledge, beliefs, and opinions are matched with existing or incoming information about events, the social contexts of news production, and representations of the reading public. More specifically, it should be stressed that news production is not a direct representation (biased or not) of events, but rather some form of discourse processing (van Dijk 1983:28).

The production of news is created and it recreates a political discourse that is not the focus of the research presented here. This study is not interested in understanding the perception of the AAP and the M5S by the media, regardless of the pertinence of this topic. I can neither neglect the fact that the media inform the common sense, and especially the political common sense, as ‘[i]f a political public can be questioned, reinforced or challenged by the action of the media, they also produce public problems and constitute publics that can convert into political publics’ (Mendes 2004b:150). Therefore, I referred to the media in order to link the analysis to the context. I made the choice to use the media as a support instrument, that is, as a point of reference for the evidence but not for the analysis. With this approach, I do not question the freedom of the press nor the deontology of journalists, but I do question the structural relation of power existing between the press and the political establishment. This I consider to be a supportive and conflictual relationship, one that I used to understand what happened but not why it happened. I utilised this option due to the contemporary nature of the AAP and the M5S, both being new political phenomena that are still emerging and developing. While refereed literature was only partially available, the press has provided this analysis with a reference to events and facts. From this, it has been possible to articulate a critical appreciation of the party-movements under scrutiny, and to do so without alienating them from the context and the democratic challenges that they faced.

The media were also utilized for additional practical reasons. In terms of a comparative study, it was not possible to follow the AAP in languages other than English,

something that I recognised as being a substantial shortcoming. The AAP leadership and the media itself privilege the use of Hindi to have a crosscut social audience in Northern India. In some cases conversations may mix Hindi and English, something that is usual in interviews carried on with Arvind Kejriwal when questions are posed to him in English and he responds in Hindi. While I appreciate the counter-hegemonic use of the language (besides the fact that Hindi is not spoken by all Indians), an English speaking researcher such as myself personally suffers from the decision of the AAP to speak Hindi (I return to the issue of language below). Therefore, while I could have a full picture of the Italian press, I was unable to have a full picture of the Indian press, and for that reason, it was decided to limit the relevance of the press in the analysis.

3.1.6 *The qualitative approach in summary figures*

The fieldwork took place in 2014 (in India) and 2015 (in Italy), see Appendix A for the objectives and chronogram. The total number of research participants directly involved with an interview or in a workshop was 134, 84 of them being in India and 50 of them being in Italy (101 men and 33 women). I conducted a total of 81 interviews (44 in India and 37 in Italy), involving a total of 83 research participants (44 in India and 39 in Italy), and I delivered five creative workshops (two in India and three in Italy) involving 57 research participants (42 in India and 15 in Italy). Some of the participants took part in two events, (i.e., two interviews or one interview and one workshop) however they are counted only once in these figures.¹⁶⁴ These numbers do not account for all research participants. For instance, many more AAP and M5S activists or grassroots activists interacted with and shared knowledge with me but they are not accounted for in these numbers, even though they are indirectly present in the analysis thanks to the participant observation and the related activities that are detailed below.

3.1.7 *Categories, transcription and coding*

The handling of research categories and sub-categories, or code and sub-codes, is a relevant and evolutionary approach in dealing with qualitative analysis as categories need to be reworked and refined during the analysis of congruent pieces of data. That is to say that

¹⁶⁴ In India two research participants were interviewed and took part to one of the creative workshops therefore the total number is 84 (not 86) of which 18 women. In Italy four research participants were interviewed and took part to the creative workshop of the M5S activists therefore the total number is 50 (not 54) of which 15 women.

‘[t]he aim is to generate theory which is fully grounded in the data. Once categories have been developed in this detailed way, the analyst can identify the most relevant categories for further elaboration, and finally proceed to a more integrated analysis around the core categories which emerge from this process’ (Dey 1993:110). Due to the inductive approach of the methodology that I chose, and due to the fact that the study had a great level of specificity characterised by very dynamic case studies, I followed this approach both during data collection and data analysis. I developed several codes that helped me organise the data collected. This data was organised as it was in order to be able to provide a wider range of analytical information before proceeding to theoretical speculation over what I deemed to be the most significant. Moreover, during the fieldwork I was alerted to the fact that the ‘investigator should seek to find out about all topics, in different contexts’ (Mendes 2003b:8). As a result of this revelation, I engaged with new topics as much as possible during the interviews and workshops, and, as a consequence, in their coding. One of the benefits of the comparative methodology is precisely the emergence of new categories or the clarification of existing ones (Mahoney 2007:126ss). The categories I developed emerged from the critical stance of the theoretical framework of the thesis. The deconstruction that took place (in the first chapter especially) was the base of the reconstruction that I expected from the empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework elaborated on by Gandhi and the epistemologies of the South.

I have adopted a three step coding which resulted in a three-layer code system. First, I coded interviews summaries in order to organise the information into topics such as: Gandhi, the AAP, the M5S, democratic Theory, political-colonialism and a number of sub categories. This coding exercise took place right after the first draft of the interview notes (or transcript). In the second step, I coded all the interview summaries (or transcripts) anew after listening again to the complete audio recordings. In this case, I adopted a code system that was more specific regarding the analytical work that was yet to come and led me to the creation of central categories for the analysis: people, leadership-structure, ethical wave, participation, horizontality-inclusion and political-line. Finally, I redefined the code system during the revision of the content of the second layer code system (this time analysed by category and not by interview or workshop) which implied a targeted focus on the specific thematic

analysed. The use of the audio was also recurrent during the third coding step. Each code system related to the thesis hypothesis and questions. For example the first code system was evolving throughout the fieldwork, paralleling the evolution of the hypothesis and question (elaborated below). The evolution of the first code system also followed the evolution of the interview semi-structured script of questions (or the mind-map of topics for the interview). The second code system represents the crystallisation of the research hypothesis and questions and the one that I used for the analysis. This kind of evolution is typical of extended case studies, as '[w]ith the extended case method, dialogue between participant and observer provides an ever-changing sieve for collecting data. This is not to deny that we come to the field with presuppositions, questions, and frameworks but that they are more like prisms than templates and they are emergent rather than fixed' (Burawoy 1998:11).

At the beginning of the analysis I transcribed a number of interviews and I realised that I needed a different method in order to achieve the expected results within the timeframe. I made the decision to base the analysis on the detailed summaries that I prepared in the field after improving them and crosschecking the texts. Here are the steps that I followed during the post fieldwork analysis:

- I analyse the written summary (drafted soon after the interview in the field). These summaries were detailed and provided an extensive index of the content of the interview. These documents were initially coded according to the code system prepared before the fieldworks and developed along them;
- I listened to all audio recordings and checked the summaries for additional data to be included and categorised. As a result of this step the summaries of the interviews become 'paraphrased transcriptions'. I paid attention to include any unit of discursive meaning, even if apparently irrelevant for the research. To a large extent the paraphrased transcriptions represented a 'rushed transcription';
- I listened to each audio files for the third time, then again I categorised the relative extended summary in the new code system arranged after the fieldwork;
- I surfed in the code system during the drafting the empirical chapters. In order to analyse the coded text, if it was not yet transcribed, I referred back to the audio files to listen to

them carefully again. If I decided that the coded text was relevant for the section that I was writing, I then transcribed and analysed it again before including it in the thesis text.

With this approach, I listened to the interviews and workshop audio at least two times each, one after the recording upon the first drafting of the summary and one during the analysis. A third selective listening occurred on specific fragments I flagged during the analysis. Moreover, the draft of the empirical chapter in India took place less than one year after the fieldwork, as did the Italian chapter. The proximity with the real ‘voices’ of the research participants reduced the abstraction that could result from the original data. This did not limit my responsibility as researcher in analysing and contextualising the material available into the larger framework of the research.

This method allowed for: being able to the work with dense concepts and workable pieces of text, a reduction in transcription work, and an increase in reflective and analytical time while being able to collapse overall disaggregation. That said, this does not negate the fact that a focus dilemma was faced similar to the one Santos experienced after his ethnography in the *favela* of Rio de Janeiro. I.e., ‘[t]he extremely rich material I had collected seemed to be sufficient and even path-breaking for almost any dissertation topic except for the one I was supposed to write about’ (Santos 1995:219).

I distanced myself from the data at this point and it led me to the acceptance that what I was writing was not only a selected topic, but rather, that it was also my own perspective as ‘to write about something means to write from the side of it: never from the centre’ (Santos 1995:235). This time for self-reflection and re-focusing allowed me to re-situate myself in the work. By highly concentrating the analytical work in well-defined periods of time, I intended to increase the use of the data collected. Working several interviews in a short period of time helped me to highlight common points, produce mixed analyses and perspectives, and identify contradictions. All these aspects were an element of strength while dealing with the empirical work.

The use of voice recorded audio fostered the authenticity of the data and increased the identification of the interviewer with the work carried on in the field that included feelings, impressions, atmosphere, emotions and memories. I believe that this approach increased the percentage of the material considered in the analysis because I did no need to exclude a part

of the data in order to make the data set workable. The MAXQDA software¹⁶⁵ permitted an extensive and punctual use of the data collected (Lee and Fielding 2009).

With reference to documented material, I believe that there is a substantial difference with non-empirical studies. As an example is Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) study on populism that focused on two units of analysis while analysing the political manifestos of parties in four countries. For this study on the AAP and the M5S, the amplitude of the evidence emerging from a number of diversified sources encouraged me to have multi units of analysis. Due to the nature of the research, although I refer to official documents and discourses, I privileged the unspoken discourse, that is, the one emerging as an evidence from political and social action, which is generally widely commented on at the grassroots – although with different emphasis by conflicting perspectives. In this view, the most controversial issues within the party-movements are seen as problematic or unproblematic by different groups. It is this unspoken discourse that I believe is responsible for a number of fractures that emerged in both case studies.

3.2 India – detailed figures and considerations

3.2.1 Interviews and pseudonyms

In India, I conducted 44 interviews.¹⁶⁶ While two research participants were interviewed twice, during two interviews I interviewed two of the research participants at the same time, therefore the number of people interviewed also amounts to 44. I selected participants to represent the variation of the AAP structure on one hand, while, on the other hand I engaged with social and Gandhian activists and academics. I categorised research participants as follows: AAP activists (3 including one who quit during the research),¹⁶⁷ AAP leaders (6 including one who resigned during the research), other politicians and diplomats

¹⁶⁵ The use of the Qualitative Data Analysis software (MAXQDA) proved to be an appropriate choice. I have neglected linguistic instruments inbuilt in the software. These are related with quantitative methods for two reasons; first, because I intended to carry out the research with qualitative methods, and second, as a consequence of my analytical method – the recurrent use of audio recordings to handle original data – I only disposed of a restricted number of full interview transcripts. Therefore, word statistics were impracticable, besides being excluded for linguistic reasons that I explain below.

¹⁶⁶ One last interview took place physically in Italy in the city of Venice during the Venice-Delhi seminars of 2014, I counted it as part of the Indian ethnography because it was related to India and by an Indian scholar.

¹⁶⁷ This number does not include the ten AAP activists that participated in the creative workshop organised at the AAP office (see below).

(5), scholars (6),¹⁶⁸ journalists (1), social activists (6), Gandhian activists (8), Gandhian scholars (5) and leaders in a Gandhian institution (4). Although I adopted these categories to be closer to the self-definition of the research participants, they are arbitrary and are used here for the sake of giving a picture of the representation and variation of the research participants. I must underline that several research participants would fit in more than one category, but for the sake of simplicity, I assigned them to only the pre-eminent one in relation to the interview responses they provided. All the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the research participants and I use the real name of a person in the text when they are a public but non-party figure. I adopted pseudonyms for the AAP leaders (i.e., Asif, Arun, Varun, Shyam) while some were not anonymised, such as Kejriwal (because the interview was done in public) and Bhaduri (she agreed to use her real name). I also adopted pseudonyms for the AAP Activists (i.e., Amarjeet, Suman, Deepika) and for other politicians and diplomats (i.e., Amitabh, Karanvir, Veena, James), while Papat Rao Pawar was not anonymised. I adopted these names mentioned above in consultation with four Indian colleagues and I used Hindu or Muslim pseudonyms according to the original and with the awareness that first names are caste neutral (caste is identifiable from the surname and for that reason they were intentionally avoided). Also, I avoided pseudonyms that could coincide with the real names of people of the same category. The full list of interviews is annexed in Appendix B.

3.2.2 Creative workshops

I organised two creative workshops. I arranged the first in cooperation with Professor Vidya Jain and Sandeep Meel Kumar at the Centre for Gandhian Studies (CGS) at the University of Rajasthan on the 30th of January. It was part of the commemorating event of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi involving 32 students of Rajasthan University, who were primarily members of the centre. I organised the second workshop with a group of ten AAP activists at the AAP Rajasthan state office. Due to the use of organiser's real names, only the workshop of the CGS is quoted in the text with details in the list of bibliographical references. Each workshop lasted approximately three hours and produced a mind map for each theme

¹⁶⁸ This number does not include the 32 students that participated in the creative workshop organised at the Centre for Gandhian Studies at the University of Rajasthan (see below).

discussed. Also, I made audio recording of both events and I analysed the material with the same procedure adopted for the interviews.

There were 32 participants (seven of which were women) who attended the workshop at the CGS. They were split into five groups, each one focusing on a topic deliberated in the plenary: group 1 – Common people in Indian politics; group 2 – Needs of the common people and their capacity of self-Governance; group 3 – Relations between Gandhi and the AAP; group 4 – Political Swaraj from the Leading Political Elite; group 5 – Gandhian Model of Democracy. The programme of the workshop was as follows:

- Presentation;
- Split participants into groups of 5-7 people;
- Choose a theme (by each group);
- Freewriting;
- Questions for opening up and for probing (the theme);
- Sense making (initial sharing of ideas about the theme);
- Mapping (brainstorm about paths of research and study);
- Generating governing questions and statements (on the theme);
- Plenary meeting;
- Reporting (by each group);
- Plus-Delta feedback.

The workshop with the AAP Activists took place at the AAP Office in Jaipur and was attended by ten participants (four of which were women). The theme discussed was the 'AAP and Swaraj'. The methodology and programme included:

- Presentation;
- Short round of bio-introduction (4 minutes each);
- Choose or confirm a theme (the group deliberated on the base of my suggestions);
- Freewriting;
- Governing questions and statements;
- Questions for opening wide and for probing (the theme);
- Sense making (initial sharing of ideas about the theme);
- Mapping (brainstorm about paths of research and study);

- Final debate;
- Plus-Delta feedback.

3.2.3 Participant observation and documentary research

The interaction with research participants and my participant observation in India turned into what was a close experience. Observation of their daily activities, cooperation with their work and understanding of their perspectives all resulted. Due to time restrictions, a variety of places visited, and different kinds of interactions with research participants, the definition of participant observation may be disputed, despite this, it was still inspired and oriented by the methodology, as seen above. I aimed to focus on exploring, through close observation and informal talks, three spheres of life and knowledge: 1) Understanding Gandhi's democratic teaching (including contrasting it with dissenting views); 2) examining the penetration of Gandhi's legacy and social relevance today in the Indian public sphere through the lens of Gandhian social activists and opponents of Gandhi; 3) Observing the AAP's perspectives for a Gandhian democratic action. In order to deploy these activities I embraced a range of actions (see Appendix C).

In order to make the most extensive experience of Gandhian activism possible, it was necessary to spend time in a Gandhian school, to do intense reading on Gandhi and to understand the life in the *ashram*. It is for this reason that I made the choice to live at KIGS. The stay at KIGS was framed in the 'Scholar in residence programme' by which the researcher lives in austere and *ashram*-like conditions recalling the example given by Gandhi. KIGS was my main residential quarter throughout the fieldwork in India except during the time in which it was necessary to attend other activities elsewhere in the country. At KIGS I gained access to the original version of the 100 volumes of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi 1994), along with other readings. I made an experience of austere living conditions in an exercise to recall the life in rural India that Gandhi had taken as a model for his life. When not at KIGS, I took residence in a number of places, and included Ralegan Siddhi village (Pune rural area), Sabarmati *Ashram* (Ahmedabad), Veddchi Village (Surat rural area), Tilonia and Devdungri (Rajsamand rural area) and Vipassana meditation centre (Jaipur).

I must be cautious in affirming the anthropological validity of my experience of *ashram* life. While I have certainly benefitted from such experiences due to their diversity, it

is important to note that there was also a lack of continuity and intensity in that regard. It is questionable whether one can carry on a demanding academic research and make a deep experience of *ashram* contemporary life at the same time. A longer stay in the *ashram* would be very fruitful but it would require a dedicated amount of time. Gandhi travelled all over India and symbolically brought the *ashram* with him as a frame of his political struggle, however, for a Westerner who is just beginning, the initial dedicated practice and self-reflection are unavoidable. Nonetheless, the experience gave me an understanding of the worldview represented by the *ashram* and its contested meaning in modern day India. This understanding gave me powerful insights into not only Gandhi's philosophy but also in the civilisational proposal he advanced and the traditional roots for that.

KIGS is conveniently located close to Rajasthan University, making it very easy to establish contact with the CGS as well as with students of the university. A good relationship with the director of CGS, Prof. Vidya Jain, allowed for the joint organisation of the workshop that was held on 30 January to happen (see description above). By chatting informally and exchanging ideas it was possible to receive consistent background information and a path of understanding of the Indian socio-political context, in particular from a youth point of view.

I cooperated with the AAP Office of Jaipur (state hub for Rajasthan) and I visited to the AAP Office in Delhi. The cooperation with the AAP office occurred throughout the entire stay. Through this cooperation, I could observe the activities of the AAP very closely and dialogue with many of its members in Jaipur and Delhi.

Hiware Bazar and Ralegan Siddhi (visited on the 12th-14th of February 2014) are model villages of rural development in India that, in Gandhi's perspective, would be the ideal centre of Indian democratic life. The renowned activist Anna Hazare, also leader of the India Against Corruption campaign, from who the AAP later emerged, reformed Ralegan Siddhi. Likewise, Hiware Bazar was led through massive reforms by the current surpanch Papat Rao Pawar. The visit to these villages permitted me a better understanding of the conditions necessary for such a rural democratic example. This allowed me a reflection of how similar places could benefit from the general debate on democracy and propagate in the country and abroad.

Additionally, I visited a number of other rural movements and activists. Most of these were oriented towards a Gandhian grassroots democratic ideal, which allowed for an understanding of their work and the implementation of Gandhian democratisations. Indeed, many Gandhian activists work in remote areas in close relationship with poor people, as they share their daily challenges and struggle with them to bring about significant change in their lives. I make a list of the places visited, it is in Appendix C while Appendix D lists the events attended during the fieldwork.

During the research, I carried on documentary research as a side and supporting activity to the main empirical work. I made a bibliographical research using the KIGS library, Gujarat Vidyapith University library (Ahmedabad), Sabarmati *Ashram* Library (Ahmedabad) and the Gandhi Peace Foundation's Library (New Delhi) and online catalogues. Furthermore, I analysed and tracked down a number of books while I purchased and shipped to Portugal around 60 book near the end of the stay. As I previously mentioned, the KIGS library possessed of a number of interesting works, principal amongst these are the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. It was possible to stay informed through media that was printed in English (both print media and online). I conducted daily regular readings of two English newspapers: *The Hindustan Time* and *The Hindu*. I created a selective archive of *The Hindu* for a six month time period (15 October-15 April), using software for bibliographical referencing (Zotero), and I also consulted other newspapers. Additionally, I consulted audio-visual material that was available online in order to deepen my understanding of the Indian public debate. I partially achieved these too in Zotero. Moreover, I acquired CDs and DVDs on specific topics and social experiences of relevance (i.e., the Hiware Bazar and Ralegan Siddhi villages). Throughout the stay I collected additional documented material such as reports, flyers, pamphlets, and informal documents (especially coming from the AAP, social movements and activists contacted).

3.2.4 Challenges and considerations

During the research period in Jaipur, I become acquainted with Indian society, culture, economics and the political context. Having prepared theoretically for the fieldwork beforehand, entrance into the field was smooth and the choice of living in an Indian (as opposed to international) structure (KIGS) reflected my aspiration to be fully immersed in the

field experience. This provided an informal environment in which I had possibilities to interact with several people of different backgrounds. Apart from the research topic, this kind of interaction provided the right kind of atmosphere for me necessary to refine my ordinary/everyday knowledge and experience of social, political and cultural issues, and to see it from different perspectives.

Formal and informal social interaction led me to the attainment of a more critical understanding. Although Gandhi was a political reference (in the discourse but not in practice) for India, several critical perspectives tackle his theories and ideas with respect to the development of India. In particular, the diversity of vision with Ambedkar and the diversity of method with Baghat Singh, trace two critical perspectives that are solidly founded in Indian society. Followers of Ambedkar are critical of Gandhi's approach to the caste system and to the issue of *Dalit* specifically (as seen above), while followers of Baghat Singh are critical of the non-violent method. Besides these two critical lines, other critiques have been raised in Indian society relating to the Gandhian developmental model, which is based on rural horizontality rather than centralisation and industrial development (also a criticism withstood by the Ambedkarians). Maintaining a critical perspective of Gandhi and the Gandhians enriched the research giving it a plurality of outlooks that resulted in a stronger formulation of Gandhian democratic ideas.

The *ashram*-like environment provided me with an insightful experience of a Gandhian living space. Both in the concrete austere living conditions and in the interaction with the Gandhian hosts, this environment stimulated me. Moreover, the lived experience in a Gandhian environment made it easier to understand Gandhian thinking and the diversity of its followers. As mentioned above, there is no 'Gandhian thinking' (or Gandhism) that can be labelled as such, but rather each Gandhian activist focuses more on a number of Gandhian characteristics and develops her work starting from there. The result is an enriching diversity of approaches that allowed me to have an overview of a vast number of possibilities for taking over Gandhi's ideas today. Being Gandhian, therefore, has a range of meanings.

Jaipur was the host city for most of the research period because around 2/3s of the time was spent in Rajasthan. The remaining 1/3 of time was spent in three other regions: Mumbai/Pune, Ahmedabad/Surat and New Delhi. A result of having stayed in these locations

is that it led me to a stronger knowledge and a more partial understanding of Indian social, cultural and political perspectives; having started from the point of view of the Rajasthani context but further enriched with the perspectives of the other regions. The balance between a stable base (Jaipur) and the travelling to the other three regions, provided a good combination of a more in-depth permanence with expanded understanding. In such a diverse country as India, much more time and experience would be needed to have a more concrete picture of its complex society, politics and culture. However, the choice that I made to divide the research work in the way described above proved to be appropriate for the limited time available.

Both in Rajasthan as well as in Maharashtra and Gujarat, I could visit rural places and to get acquainted with Gandhian activism at the grassroots. In addition, it provided me an opportunity to get to know the work of some of the most prominent Gandhian activists such as Anna Hazare, Aruna Roy and Narayan Desai (some of the most prominent). Through these experiences, I had a close look into a number of 'emergent' grassroots democratic experiments. Rural and human development is fundamental in the Gandhian vision of democracy and the visit to these relevant rural movements provided a great asset to the whole research project. These experiments represent some of the most advanced knowledge of Gandhian activism and a very appropriate counter-vision to the AAP approach to Gandhian values because the AAP is mainly concentrated in urban areas and its perspective reflect such a context. Finally, and importantly, the experience in rural India provided a clearer and more cohesive picture of Indian society, politics and culture.

Interviewing came to be a familiar task quite early during the Indian experience. I established a good network of contacts very early on. This allowed me to involve more and more people in the research and I realised quite early that my objective of interviewing 20 key research participants would be greatly surpassed. In the end, I collected more than the double of the planned interviews along with two workshops. This had been a demanding task in terms of empirical work but proved to be extremely productive for the scope of the research. Most of the interviews had a classical structure and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour in length. Some of them became a sort of conversation lasting over one and a half hour, or sometimes, even up to three hours. The interview with Suman in Jaipur, was a long conversation that

started at the top of the AAP office for about half an hour and continued down on the second floor for another three hours. The talk which touched upon a number of topics, was cheered up with three or four *chai* (sweet milk tea), signalling the conviviality established with research participants. Hospitality became part of the research as a number of long interview-conversations, including accommodation and dining.¹⁶⁹ In these situations, as well as in many others, I was welcomed as a person before being welcomed as a researcher. I had the feeling I was involved in much more than simply an academic activity. I felt I was part of a wider human enterprise that is a joint effort to look differently at the future. While feeling privileged I realised that I was experiencing self-reflexivity, something I learned from the epistemologies of the South, especially the procedure of Intercultural translation. I was received and treated as an 'ignorant' but 'learning' intercultural interpreter with whom knowledge was shared very openly.

The combination of the time frame and geographies described above, gave me an opportunity to participate in relevant national and international events. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the most interesting of these took place in remote areas, and they proved to be extremely relevant for the research as they allowed me to have a closer understanding of Indian society and democratic spirit.

3.3 Italy – detailed figures and considerations

3.3.1 Interviews and pseudonyms

I conducted a total of 37 interviews in Italy. Two research participants were interviewed twice while during four of the interviews I interviewed two research participants at the same time. The number of people interviewed totalled 39. I selected participants to represent the variation of the M5S at the local level scale (with special focus to represent two groups studied in the town of Latina) and at the institutional scale (municipal, regional, national, EU). I also interviewed activists of other Italian cities especially if they held a critical

¹⁶⁹ Apart from Suman, I entertained long interview-conversations with Narayan Desai, Sharit Bhowmik, Kavita Srivastava, Varun and Amarjeet. I was offered overnight hospitality when the meeting occurred in remote rural areas of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, as was the case in Tilonia (Aruna Roy), Veddchi (Narayan Desai) and Ralegan Siddhi (Anna Hazare). A number of the social movements provide guest facilities at their organisations and the careful collaborators offered this option, as did Nikhil Day, Sangamitra Gadekar, Surendra Gadekar, Kaori Kurihara and Amol Zende. Interviewee's also gave offers to visit their homes and have dinner, as was the case with Kavita Srivastava, Narayan Desai and Varun.

stance about the movement or if they had specific insights. I categorised research participants as follows: M5S activists (18, one was not interviewed but participated in a creative workshop), M5S municipal representatives (2), M5S Regional MPs (2), M5S national MPs (2), M5S Senators (4), M5S Euro MPs (1) and scholars (11). All representatives of the M5S consider themselves activists, but they were assigned only to the relative administrative category in which they were elected for the sake of giving a picture of the representation and variation of research participants. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the research participants and use the real name of the research participant in the case that they were scholars. I adopted pseudonyms (first name only) for 28 research participants that were either activists or representatives of the M5S. Likewise, out of the participants whom attended the creative workshop, five of them were M5S activists (only one of them was not interviewed separately – pseudonym Fermo). One M5S Activist, Federico Pistono, agreed to the use his real name due to the fact that he published comments on the M5S in different media. The number of interviews per category and the list of synonyms is as follows: 16 activists (Carmen, Folco, Giacinto, Irene, Martino, Nadia, Pamela, Romeo, Tullio, Viola, Ugo, Vasco, Zeno, Anselmo, Cecilia, Ennio); two representatives of the municipal level (Basilio and Bertoldo); two regional MPs (Samuele and Wilma); two Members of Parliament – (*Camera dei Deputati* – Jacopo and Leone); four Senators – (*Senato della Repubblica* – Achille, Domenico, Elda and Oscar); and one Member of the European Parliament (Dora). One MP (Jacopo) and one senator (Oscar) were expelled from the M5S by the time the interview took place. Also, two activists (Viola and Ugo) decided to quit the movement. Some of the activists served as parliamentary assistants to MPs and Senators but they remain identified as activists. I adopted first names as pseudonyms in compliance with the choice made for in India. To assign pseudonyms I spanned the alphabet from a to z and each research participant was assigned a pseudonym letter that coincided with the chronological order of the interviews. I avoided that pseudonyms chosen were allowed to coincide with the real names of other people of the same category. For these reasons, the pseudonyms chosen may not be the most common names in Italy. The full list of interviews is annexed in Appendix E.

3.3.2 Creative workshops

As was done in India, I organised creative workshops in Italy. In total, three workshops were held, two of these with the Ph. D. school of Sapienza University and one with the M5S activists. I was invited by the M5S activists to moderate an open-air creative workshop in the main square of Latina on the 17th of July 2015.¹⁷⁰ I welcomed the opportunity and facilitated the event attended by around 60 people while others came and went. This event was the second and most participated in a series of events titled ‘Latina meets: let’s regain possession of city squares’ (*Latina Incontra: riappropriamoci delle piazze cittadine*), an initiative that M5S activists carried out on a regular basis between July and November of 2015. Due to the fact that this event took the format of a public hearing and debate, and due to the varied number of topics touched upon along with the limited use of methodology (it was reduced to the self-moderation approach), I do not include this workshop in the research analysis.

The creative workshop was organised with the activists for the ‘meetup 256’, on 27th of March 2015. It was attended by five activists (one of which was a woman). I organised two more workshops with Ph. D. candidates and Ph. D. holders from the programme of ‘Political Studies’ at Sapienza University of Rome. These occurred on the 10th and 16th of July and were attended by six participants (of which two were women) and eight participants (of which three were women) respectively. The second workshop was organised as a follow up to the first in order to develop some targeted topics in more depth. Four research participants attended both workshops for a total of ten participants (of which four were women). Due to the use of real names, only these two workshops are quoted in the text with details in the list of bibliographical references. The total number of research participants attending the three workshops in Italy was 15 (of which five were women). I made audio recording of the three workshops and I analysed the material following the same procedure adopted for the interviews.

The creative workshop with the M5S activists was entitled ‘power in democracy’ (*potere nella democrazia*), and the methodology closely followed the initial proposal which is reported below. The experience was particularly rewarding as in the feedback session activists

¹⁷⁰ Documentation of the event is available here: <https://www.meetup.com/it-IT/5-Stelle-Latina-in-MoVimento/events/223874008/>.

affirmed that they enjoyed the methodology and it could be used as a potential instrument to bridge the divide between local groups of activists.

- Presentation and approval of methodology
- Choose a theme (by the group);
- Freewriting;
- Debate
 - Questions for opening wide and for probing (the theme);
 - Open debate (token self-moderation system);
 - Sense making (initial sharing of ideas about the theme);
- Mapping (brainstorm about paths of research and study);
- Generating governing questions and statements (on the theme);
- Plus-Delta feedback.

The first of the two workshops with the colleagues of the 'Political Studies' programme of Sapienza University of Rome, was extremely engaging and ranged around the topic 'democratic potential and authoritarian limits of the M5S' (*potenziale democratico e limiti autoritari del M5S*). The proposed methodology closely followed the one used in the workshop with the M5S activists but differed in that the group decided to revise it by expanding the debate session and by excluding the mapping, governing questions and statements and feedback sessions. The second workshop touched upon three topics: 'formal/procedural democracy vs. substantial democracy' (*democrazia formale/procedurale vs. democrazia sostanziale*), 'national politics vs. local politics' (*political nazionale vs. politica locale*), and 'participation vs. leader-centralism' (*partecipazione vs. centralismo della leadership*). Additionally, during the second workshop, the methodology was revised as freewriting was included and participants privileged the debate over the rest of the methodology, and thereby decided to eliminate the concluding part of the methodology because a delay had accumulated, they were tired and the warm temperature was making it unbearable. Both workshops at Sapienza University were extremely fruitful for the analysis, as the empirical chapter on the M5S reveals, even if the methodology was largely minimised.

3.3.3 Participant observation and documentary research

In January of 2015, I started the participant observation with the local group of the M5S in Latina. Their meetings were organised on an ongoing basis, and while they did not follow a regular schedule, I attended most of them. Generally the meetings took place at the end of the evening or after dinner and lasted until a variable time between midnight and 2 am. Meetings were organised on average once or twice a week, and while there may have been more than two in a given week, there rarely was an occasion where no meetings took place for a given week. The meetings of the month of January were extremely important for understanding the dynamic of the local group, as this was due to the resignation of three national representatives that occurred in December 2014. At the end of January, the original group 'The Crickets and Cicadas of Latina' (*I Grilli e le Cicale di Latina*, 'meetup 256') split in two and a cluster of activists created a second group called '5 Star Latina in Movement' (*5 Stelle Latina in Movimento*, meetup 5SLIM). Due to the latency of the creation and establishment of the new group, I began to participate in their meetings starting from the 31st of March 2015. Meanwhile, I continued to participate in the meetup 256 activities and from this date forward until the end of fieldwork in Italy, I followed both movements.

The participant observation in the local groups of the M5S of Latina became more and more intense as the political situation of the city became more and more unstable. This was the case until the beginning of June when the mayor did not pass a vote of confidence from the city council. Both meetup groups intensified their activities and also the number of participants and enthusiasm in meetings increased. Without a mayor, an election was expected to take place the following year (eventually occurred on the 5th and 19th of June 2016) and the possibility of coordinating between the two groups is something that became a political objective, as will be elaborated below. The relations between activists of the two groups had been very tense between the months of January and May, but in June several activists of both groups considered a cooperation or even a re-union possible. Although there were a number of activists that openly opposed the reunion and even the simple cooperation, a number of joint meetings took place and the interaction between the two groups became more intense. Participating in both groups, as a researcher and activist, required that I played a bridging role in an attempt to favour dialogue among the factions. At the termination of the

fieldwork phase at the end of July, the perspective of dialogue was being worked out. Participation in all possible meetings continued and incidentally this was also the period in which most of the interviews were made. The ability to carry out participant observation during these seven months was a fortunate opportunity, as at this time there were a wide range of micro-political dynamics that occurred at the local level that I could observe and participate in.

Participating at the local level allowed me to become part of bigger circle of regional and national information flows and events. Although the M5S is arguably unstructured, participation at the local level facilitated my presence in activities at the regional and, to some extent, the national level. Moreover, I participated in a number of other events with the aim of better understanding the Italian political public sphere and its dynamics. Most of the events attended were identified and selected for their possible impact on the research (full list attached in the Appendix F).

I carried on documentary research activities with the academic activities of the Ph. D. programme in 'Political Studies' using online catalogues and the libraries of Sapienza University. Numerous books were screened, studied and archived mainly for the development of the theoretical part of the thesis. When possible, I archived the digital version of books and articles with the bibliographical referencing software (Zotero). I regularly consulted the online version of the Italian newspaper "La Repubblica" and "Il Fatto Quotidiano" while I consulted other newspapers occasionally. I selectively archived relevant articles through Zotero. Furthermore, I made a regular use of TV broadcast news, analysis and debate programmes, together with online multimedia as these helped to deepen understanding of the Italian public debate focusing on the M5S. I collected a number of other documents in formats such as reports, flyers, pamphlets, and informal documents available at events and online.

3.3.4 *Challenges and considerations*

The cooperation with Rome University proved to be an asset as it enriched the theoretical and empirical perspectives and helped in the understanding and analysing of the Italian political public sphere. It also provided a political science disciplinary perspective that was highly beneficial in the drafting of the theoretical chapter of this thesis and it also

extended the empirical and analytical perspectives. The constant travel to Rome offered me the possibility to make a number of relevant interviews both with activists and representatives of the M5S, as well as to other scholars in the areas of sociology and political science. Thanks to the close proximity to La Sapienza and to the good environment to draft written work, I was able to combine periods of thesis drafting with field research and participation in academic activities.

The dialogue had with the colleagues of the Ph. D. programme in Political Studies at the University Sapienza, as well as the enrichment derived from an active academic life within the academic community of Rome, provided critical and epistemological diversity to the perspectives found in this study. Confronted with such diversity, for instance, with respect to the approach adopted in Coimbra in terms of socio-political analysis, I react with an extension of the consideration to areas of political thought such as the beginning of the XX century in Europe. Scholars and thinkers from this period were already under consideration, however, participation in seminars, development of the analysis, further readings, and an understanding of different research perspectives in this area all resulted in an enrichment for the researcher and the research.

The research inquiries into the questions raised by populism in order to understand the crisis of political liberalism more appropriately and this argument came to assume a central importance in the theoretical development. Linking populism with political-colonialism provided an extension of analytical categories and the adoption of a critical stance towards the bold critics of populism as mere demagogy. Populism demonstrates that the abuse of political discursive techniques may be done by traditional parties and likewise by so called 'populist movements/parties', in particular in times of electoral campaigns. Nonetheless, the relevance of populism to the research needs to also be framed within the responses – however perfectible they may be – that party-movements (such as the M5S and the AAP) are providing to the political-colonial system. The emergence of new categories in the research marked a deviation from the initial project, but did not imply a contradiction.

In Italy, I focused the research on two M5S meetup groups, meetup 256 and meetup 5SLIM. I have selectively excluded three other groups for a number of different reasons. These included the '5 Star – Women in Movement Latina Rome World' (*5 Stelle – Donne in*

Movimento Latina Roma Mondo), and ‘5 star of Human Rights and Geopolitics - Latina’ (*5stelle dei Diritti Umani e Geopolitica - Latina*) groups, who were excluded for their reduced membership, participation, focus, thematic scope, less dynamism and lack of collective organisation. The meetup group ‘Friends of Beppe Grillo of Latina’ (*Amici di Beppe Grillo di Latina*) become active when the ethnography was terminating and its membership is largely part of the two meetup groups analysed or not from the town. Finally, the group ‘Meetup Civic Activism Latina is ours’ (*Meetup Activism Civico Latina è nostra*) was founded in October 2015, after the ethnography. I took the decision to focus on just two meetup groups, following the dynamics of the activist groups since January, I deemed meetup groups 256 and 5SLIM far more participatory, organised and consistent, and therefore beneficial for understanding the dynamics of the activists groups inspired by the M5S. The activities and records registered in the website www.meetup.com confirm that these two groups are less active, something that was evident from participating in the meetup 256 and 5SLIM. As of the 28th of October 2015, I categorised data available on www.meetup.com concerning the meetings and organised by each of these meetup groups. The data collected confirmed the decision to focus on only the two meetup groups mentioned above and to exclude the groups that were participated by only a few people as they did not seem to add any analytical evidence that would help to understand the dynamics of the movement in Latina, especially with respect to the meetup groups 256 and 5SLIM. In the empirical chapter I provide further evidence.

3.4 Some limits of the reflexive research(er)

3.4.1 Considerations on the qualitative methods

I have a few remarks concerning issues related to the qualitative figures, although they are unrelated among themselves. There are four considerations: ‘Gandhism’, anonymization, the interview question list script and the different emphasis between the fieldworks conducted in India and in Italy.

In this work special attention is dedicated to the notion of ‘Gandhian’. Gandhian scholars and activists agree that the legacy of Gandhi is so vast, is inter-disciplinary, is personally demanding and is culturally counter-hegemonic (and is therefore challenging to implement in modern-day-global-oriented societies). The result is that one can barely define oneself as being Gandhian in the pure sense of the term. However, Gandhian activists and

scholars recognise that they selectively follow Gandhi in their limited capacity and under their interpretation of Gandhian thinking. These activists are developing Gandhian ideas and applying them in the current socio-political context that is something that Gandhi himself could not do. Tridip Suhrud, clarified these points in his interview:

I think [of] two things. One is that a lot of social movements, and not just currently, but a lot of social movements post-independence, have drawn upon certain notions of Gandhian practices [and] also certain notions of Gandhian thought. And these are wide ranging movements from redistribution of land to ecological movements, protection of habitat, movements against nuclear installation, movements against large dams, about [the] right to Information... and a lot of these movements have actually drawn upon - or claimed to have drawn upon - Gandhian Ideas as also practice, in terms of how do you mobilise people, how do you create non-violent social formations, how do you actually challenge the state, and, in each of these realities many of the social movements actually acknowledged that they have learned from Gandhi. Of course, I think what's important is that they have actually taken the Gandhian movement and ideas in directions that Gandhi did not visualise. Because Gandhi did not necessarily visualise the movement against large dams, or he did not necessarily visualise the movement on ecology and environment in the clear terms in which today we recognise. Although you can find... you know that he is concerned about these things but these are not necessarily primary concerns. So, I think the movements have also helped us pick Gandhian ideas forward. So it's not only borrowing, I think it's more important what they contribute to, are a broader understanding of the large framework of Gandhi's ideas (interview Tridip Suhrud).

From this it is possible to understand that the concept of 'Gandhian' is different with respect to 'Gandhi's'. It is generally selective but it does also imply an evolution and contextualisation of Gandhi's thought to contemporary social challenges. Therefore, the concept 'Gandhian' is at the same time a limited and expanding vision, which implies the absence of core approbation even among Gandhians themselves.

The anonymization of the research participants proved to be a demanding task. On the one hand, I wanted to preserve their anonymity, but on the other hand, I had to avoid allowing the work of social activists and scholars to be diminished by silence. In fact, I attempted to incorporate the research participants' space of influence in the constellation of meanings. Finally, I needed to maintain consistency between the data collected in India and in Italy. This had to be done even though the two fieldwork periods were different for a number of reasons, such as the sampling and representativeness of the case studies of two parties-movements that suffered different developments. This led me to the decision to anonymise the identity of the AAP and the M5S activists and leaders, along with that of the

politicians and diplomats that participated in the research. The real identity of social activists and scholars that participated, however, was used.

It is important to underline that all research participants gave their consent to be audio recorded during the interview and for the recordings to be used in the development of the research framework. I opted to adopt only the first name as pseudonyms to anonymise research participants. This was due to the fact that I had to work two cases with dissimilar complexities and I wanted to maintain homogeneity amongst the data. As mentioned above, in India surnames are indicative of castes and region of origin, the adoption of pseudonyms could be misleading if decontextualized from the cultural background. I considered the adoption of pseudonyms in a third language (i.e. English) but I discharged this option as I regarded it to be patronising and confusing.

During interviews, I had a clear understanding of the concept of research participant and I engaged in empathy with the persons that I interviewed. Conducting semi-structured interviews, I used a script with a list of questions that I generally attempted to cover in its entirety. This was not always possible for two reasons. The first one is related with the balance between the number of questions, the time available and the length of the responses. When responses of the research participants were lengthy, I preferred not to interrupt in order to expand my knowledge and perception of the issue at stake and to remain open to the serendipity of the field. The second reason is related with the search for what I can call 'empathic enquiry', which is my attempt to pursue the topics on which the research participant had interesting and innovative information about, rather than merely bringing them back to a flat list of pre-determined questions. For this reason, I soon switched from the sequential script with the list of questions to a mind map of issues leading to interview-contextualised questions. The map was able to provide me with all the topics I wanted to know about in one glance. It also provided me with topics, and subtopics – or questions and sub-questions – once the discussion embraced one research path or another. While the main topics of the map remained throughout all the research period, I could expand the map with sub-topics or connected topics as long as I engaged in research activities and through the serendipity of 'empathic inquiry'.

This chapter provides an analysis of the methodological options that were used and accounts for how they were implemented. As in the rest of the work, the balance between India and Italy is not – and cannot be – symmetrical. This, however, is not to the detriment of the research. In India, I faced a number of epistemological challenges that I did not have to face in Italy, and this can be inferred by the different emphasis that illustrates the two accounts above. For example from the cultural perspective, India had, for me much more to tell than the country where I was born and lived for over twenty years. As a human being I learnt much more in India than in Italy and as a reflexive scientist I account for this process here. From the perspective of the epistemologies of the South, the ‘South’ is a theoretical horizon, and this is the reason why I focused the research on the thought and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi. Studying Gandhi and the AAP in India was more demanding compared to studying the M5S and participating in academic life in Italy.

The double focus that I had in India combined with the temporal limitations, forced me to intensity research activities as much as I could. In Italy, I stayed three months longer, and life was much more regular and regulated than in India. Both possessed equally intense participant observation activities concerning the party-movement component of the research. I consider that the imbalance that resulted is a part of the reflexive science adopted.

I need to stress that I regard the two cases as equally enriching, although for different reasons, and that their diversities justified heterogeneous forms of inquiry, which they were applied differently in the two contexts. From the perspective of a social scientist, I do not believe that the evidence collected in India is more significant than the evidence collected in Italy, or vice versa. These are the reasons why the two accounts are asymmetrical but equally relevant for the research in terms of providing social and political innovations. Both the AAP and the M5S contain – with equal density and different typologies – this innovative potential.

3.4.2 *On language*

I opted to exclude a linguistic approach in the analysis because I recognised it was impossibility to grant equality of treatment to the texts coming from India and Italy. In India, I spoke in English, which was not my mother tongue nor of the research participants. I acknowledged that this caused a gap and a resultant loss of communication and data, but there existed no alternative, however, as learning an Indian language – even just Hindi – would

have required an intensive and extended period of time, something the schedule of the study had no space for. An awareness of the language gap encouraged me to deal with the data collected in India with caution. For this reason, I took extended notes that I wrote as soon as possible after the interview. I generally did this the same day as the interview and in a few cases I did it within a few days after the interview. With this exercise, most of the information from the interview tended to be freshly retained, allowing it to be codified or entered into the diary.

Another reason why I avoided a linguistic approach relates to the written language, and the challenge faced with the transcription of the interviews. In the one case (India), it was literally possible to cite interviews in the thesis text, but a text produced from two non-native English speakers. In the other case (Italy), the interview or workshop occurred in the mother tongue of the interlocutors but it is not the language of the thesis, and therefore the original material recorded in Italian had to be translated and cited in English. In both cases an accurate analysis of the language could not be expected to take place within a fair and controllable level of approximation. Moreover, the approximation necessary in the two cases was different, as in the first case it was at the level of oral language while in the second case it was at the level of written language, resulting in unparalleled approximations.

I opted to focus on content over language and form and, although I made every effort to preserve the original content of the conversations and excerpts cited, I rarely include expressive, grammatical or syntactic details. Due to the conversational mode of the interviews, many of the passages quoted omit interludes between the interviewer and the interviewee (both equally participating to the conversation although with asymmetric roles) and jargon expressions or parenthetical reference to other arguments. I took the responsibility of these choices with the awareness that working with a text is a reflexive activity that cannot evade the opinion of the researcher, no matter how objective the researcher aims to be. I assume that these choices report my interpretation of the interviews and of the most important information, and also I assume I excluded from the analysis information that other researchers or other methodologies would not exclude. This approach complies with the overall methodological choices made to face the challenge of collecting data in the specific cultural and linguistic contexts of the fieldwork. In a political research context this is

fundamental because ‘such groups and movements formulate their repertoires of struggle based not only on the specific social and political contexts in which they operate but also on different cultural premises and symbolic universes’ (Santos 2014:214).

3.4.3 *Leaving the intellectual and personal comfort zone*

Since the beginning of the ALICE project, Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos invited me to leave my intellectual comfort zone to embrace a research experience which could engage with unknown knowledge and experiences and then combine this recently learned knowledge and experience with those that I already possessed, and explore the ‘emergences’ of the field to engage in new intellectual paths. I embraced this challenge with enthusiasm, as having studied philosophy and human rights pre-eminently with a theoretical approach, I possessed a level of excitement over having to switch towards disciplines such as sociology and political science through which I could engage with empirical research. This venture into a zone of non-comfort occurred with a mix of uncertainty, enthusiasm, doubts and hope. To face this dialectics I put forward all my effort and hard work in order to fill theoretical and methodological gaps and valorise the potential of the yet unknown knowledge that could emerge.

I ventured outside of my comfort zone in different ways, as in addition to the disciplinary, I explored with new topics, geographies, knowledge systems, and new forms of understanding knowledge systems. Democracy as a topic was a new subject for me, and while I eagerly engaged with the literature, the more I read the more I discovered the amplitude of this topic. India as a geographical location was also new to me, its cultural diversity, richness of history and plurality of socio-political discourses. Initially thundering, these demanded me some time to find a way through, while I realised that even the whole life would not be enough to engage with just the most interesting and important discourses. Moreover, having chosen Gandhi as a reference, I entered in a plurality of views, interpretations, and critiques. Empirical methodology was also outside of my comfort zone, and in this chapter I attempt to report how I dealt with the dialectic between uncertainty and excitement.

Leaving one’s comfort zones also implies leaving one’s physical zone of comfort. Every researcher is aware that conducting research demands personal renunciation and a high level of self and family versatility. In this study, this was no exception. I exercised caution to

protect research work against my personal and family needs. I suspended or declined many activities, especially during fieldwork. On the other hand, research is also an opportunity to gain life experience, taste foods, meet people, speak languages, see places and feel the world diversity, something that is an extremely enriching practise. I had this all in mind when I proposed the idea to my wife Sofia to come with me to India for the fieldwork that needed to be conducted there. Having married a few months earlier, she welcomed the opportunity and used this chance to gain work experience in rural grassroots activism. Besides the experience in India, she had been with me since the beginning of the research work in 2011, and helped me endure all different kinds of difficulties and supported in many tasks.

The pages of this study emerge with this feminine presence that was next to me, and accompanied me in the field. We had conversations about the human and professional experiences we had both made, and her feminine presence helped me to see the reality through different, feminist, eyes. Directly and indirectly, Sofia helped me to learn what I was learning in a richer way. The account of the research as it emerged in the dialogue with Sofia would require a separate narrative.

In this methodological account, I must underline the moral, intellectual and physical support she gave me, especially during psychologically challenging times and times of physical illness. At times she served as my research collaborator, for instance when she helped me categorise the press, assisted during some of the interviews and facilitated the logistics of the fieldwork. Sofia and I endured this intense research work together, with the commitment and sacrifice it demanded. The process was not been smooth and at times the challenges were hard to face, but the result has informed this fundamental relationship. If I had to conduct this same experience alone, I would probably benefit from a higher level of independence but would lose much in terms of support and with the dialogic dimension. I believe that a researcher is never alone, and that research is social plagiarism because it codifies knowledge that emerges from a network of relations. Santos (2014:7) defines it as '*[t]he impossibility of collective authorship*', the knowledge written by a researcher engaged with the social reality with which she investigates is the result of a collective effort emerging from research participants in the field. I believe it is also the result of the basic relations of the researcher,

time and life constraints and dynamism that these relations allow, forbid and challenge, especially close family relations.

3.4.4 *The body and the research*

During the first weeks of my enrolment in the Ph. D. programme 'Democracy in the XXI century' at the University of Coimbra, in the autumn 2011, I heard the Professor Giovanni Allegretti, director of the Ph. D. programme, affirming that carrying out Ph. D. research is a challenging existential experience. At the time I had already written three other theses in the past, and therefore, I could not fully understand Allegretti's assertions that pointed out the especially demanding psychological stress implied in such a complex enterprise. Over the following five years, I would experience such stress and reacted to it with attempted mitigation, which, I must recognise, was not always successful. Moreover, I was challenged by a number of health issues that implied impediment to the work and delay to the always-provisional schedule.

Before enrolling in the Ph. D. programme I thought that I had a very strong physical resistance to stress and work, however during the fieldwork in India I must have exceeded my work limits, as three times in one month I had to stop for a one or two days due to the flu, which was evidently related to work overload and lack of sleep. The most conspicuous health-related working obstacle occurred when I broke my right arm and carried a plaster cast around for the next two months, a period in which I had already begun typing of the theoretical chapters and fieldwork in Italy was just starting. In response to this challenge, I experimented with a tablet to enhance my operability and processing of data. When I was almost fully recovered from the arm injury, I started to experience the most serious health issue of the period, that of a hearing problem which started on 6th December of 2014. Since then, I experience tinnitus and sensorineural hearing loss in the left hear, something which I was not able to correct despite two months spent receiving hospital treatments and other therapies. A year later, while fully immersed in writing, I experienced muscular problems in the back along with one on the left arm, and followed by one on the right arm. These injuries came at different times and required different kinds of treatments and therapy that I carried out patiently during work brakes. Finally, I had an eye problem, a corneal ulcer treated with antibiotics that was temporarily cured but after a few weeks another corneal ulcer emerged.

Since then, I need to use an ophthalmic gel in order to keep my eye lubricated. These are some of the signs that indicate the participation of the body of the researcher in the research.

I have no reason to believe that I could have escaped these health problems if I would not been working on the Ph. D. research. It is clear that the commitment to the work helped me to overcome the physical challenges and to make these issues reasons of personal development. This is just the confirmation that making research is a holistic exercise that requires the readiness of the body and the mind. This cannot be accomplished without also taking care of diet and body exercise and relaxation in order to avoid too much accumulation of weight, stress, tiredness and sadness and to balance sedentariness. I now fully understand that Allegretti's observation relates to the rounded experience of making research, an experience that encompasses the researcher in the research and requests her personal bodily commitment, no matter how objective the researcher claims her work to be.

3.5 From theory to empirical data

In this section, I will briefly introduce the research rationale, starting with the description of the major reasons that led me to engage with the research and to opt for the theoretical framework and the thematic analysis that I choose. I will then elaborate on some preoccupations and observations concerning the political and intercultural challenges of the research work, issues that were expected since the beginning and that partially emerged with the progress of the work.

3.5.1 *Introducing research's rationale and theoretical option*

The research of which this thesis is the main result, originated within the framework of the ALICE research project taking place at the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra. ALICE has benefited from over four decades of eminent intellectual reflection by Professor Santos and is well framed in the epistemologies of the South (see the theoretical chapters for more insight). I applied to the ALICE project as a junior researcher, as I was attracted and fascinated by the projects theoretical framework. Since the beginning of the work as a researcher in ALICE, I was motivated to move into developing my own Ph. D. research work, related to the research position of the project. I did so in order to deepen my knowledge of Santos' approach and to use it as a bridge towards the 'South', a primordial pole of attraction for me and my ideas (see Gianolla 2010).

Both the ALICE project and the dozens of research works that have been framed within its scope, have been developed by scholars coming from different geographical and disciplinary backgrounds. They start with the epistemologies of the South and work to challenge them with the social, political, cultural, economic and legal experiences of people suffering from the exclusion that is produced by three main forces: colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. The epistemologies of the South emerge as a necessity of dialogue, not to disqualify or underestimate the existence of conflict, but rather to subvert the logic of fragmentation and universal domination produced by the three main forces listed above, and to create subaltern alliances based on the principle of equality and respect of differences. This is the epistemological base of Santos' 'subaltern' or 'insurgent' cosmopolitanism (Santos 2006c:35–84, 2014:134–35), which is another fundamental point of contact with my previous research interests (Gianolla 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

Within ALICE and its 'epistemologies', I found an intellectually stimulating framework that contrasts the rigid division between the scientific and non-scientific, academic and non-academic, and formal and informal knowledge structures. These investigate the epistemological potential of a dialogue between different kinds of knowledge and includes artistic, informal, popular, and literary knowledge along with all knowledge generally emerging from the experience of those oppressed by colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. Dialogue has been a central presence since the origin of my studies in philosophy (Gianolla 2011, 2012) and it finds a fecund environment in the epistemologies of the South, which search for alternative narratives with respect to the mainstream of Western modernity, and attempt a dialogue among narratives with the certainty that the outcome may produce mutual learning and progressive knowledge to emerge.

Through combining this background with my interests and experience, the present research was able to find its founding principles and the reason for selecting the topic, the theoretical approach and the empirical cases. Apart from its metaphorical use, the global South refers to countries that have historically suffered from colonial oppression. India is one such country, as its struggle for independence has had a unique trajectory.

Being a national Indian figure, Gandhi may also be considered to be a 'world master' as his lessons have brought a richness to the world. In view of the epistemologies of the South,

he is a leading figure with respect to unveiling oppression and potentiate emerging and emancipatory social, economic, cultural and political alternatives. I had an innate interest in Mahatma Gandhi and as soon as it emerged I simply took up this opportunity to study his theories and teachings. This research constituted an unprecedented and possibly never-ending occasion to deepen my understanding, learn new knowledge, stimulate my critical analysis and discover new areas of research. My future work will be highly informed by this great learning experience where I was able to engage with this theoretical framework. While I was absorbed in reflecting on this work, I made note of a number of research topics that I would like to investigate in the future.

The idea that liberal democratic regimes can be identified as a political-colonial system derives from the wider concept of democracy as an ideal of horizontality and unconformity with the fate of modern political regimes, something that resonates tremendously with the epistemologies of the South. I am aware that I am not original in this approach, however it is the main reason I use to explain the political crises that I identify with the crises of political liberalism (see theoretical chapters above). Nonetheless, with this formulation I reframe the question starting from basic notions that constitute modern political theory and advancing to a critical and constructive approach. The theoretical chapters above explore how a fragile concept of democracy substantiates liberal regimes and the Western historical trajectory that limited political participation (minimalist procedural tasks), and led to the selection of the political elite (who were then entitled to legislate and govern).

3.5.2 Reasons and context for the choice of the cases

The epistemologies of the South find a great – and rather immediate – reference in Gandhi, as does the research departing from the Mahatma’s theories. This research ought to investigate possible developments in the current social and political reality, by maintaining the comparative approach. The possible subjectivities to be studied are innumerable, especially in India, and for this study a choice needed to be made. According to the theoretical framework, I identify: liberal democratic regime flows in its system of representation, the elitist structure of the political establishment, and the centrality of a procedural approach (as opposed to a substantial one). I was therefore motivated to identify social and political subjectivities engaged in linking state and civil society, reconceptualising the role of political

leadership and reformulating the interaction of citizens and state institutions, and to do so based on a participatory approach. I searched for emerging social subjectivities that advocated for the political empowerment of the people and to take decisions based on their concerns. This was a complicated task for two reasons: the first, is that Gandhi proposed a different worldview alongside a different notion of democracy and in my research for social and political movements, I could not identify perfectly matching subjectivities. Gandhi's concepts – of the individual, his relation with the self and society, the centrality of duty and service as well as the insistence on rights, and the spiritual deepness of his political proposal – although secular, are unique and at odds with the materialism of Western modernity, both in his time and – even more so – in ours. Ashis Nandy (2000), identified various Gandhis, one of them being the Gandhians' view of Gandhi. The Gandhians are well aware of the differences among themselves, as they are of the fact that their view of Gandhi may differ from the one held by others. They are also conscious of the fact that they can concentrate only on one or a few of the several fronts of struggle embraced by their master. As mentioned in the chapter above, although many prominent Gandhians have followed in the footsteps of Gandhi (e.g., via one historical struggle or another), there is no perfect Gandhian.¹⁷¹ The second reason why it was difficult to identify social subjectivities for the study has to do with the fact that, in accordance with the theoretical premises, I wanted to focus on the move from the informal to the formal field of democracy. This concerns political movements that aim at changing the political

¹⁷¹ Many Gandhians followed Gandhi's example and decided to dedicate their lives to social work rather than filling institutional roles, the most famous among them was Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) and Jayaprakash Narayan (known as JP, 1902-1979). Another activist Narayan Desai (1924-2015), son of Gandhi's personal secretary, lived in Gandhi's *ashrams* and spent his life in social service supporting the Mahatma's first and then Bhave and JP with social work. Currently, several activists are operating with a Gandhian approach, however different that approach may be. Aruna Roy and Anna Hazare are two renown Gandhians among others that in the last years have succeeded in focusing the country's attention to striking social concerns and in creating pressure for the delivery of important legislation for the sake of transparency (Right to Information – RTI) and anti-corruption (Jan Lokpal Bill). They live and work at the local and community level for social change. Their work has attracted many volunteers who are active in long and difficult campaigns that have the merit to mobilise the attention of the whole country. The anti-corruption movement produced two main effects: '[f]irst, it was the apparent failure of the Indian representative democracy to satisfy people's expectations. In other words, the legitimacy of the elected representatives was questioned. Consequently, citizen's participation in decision-making emerged as an important issue in the context of Indian democracy. Secondly, [the] Gandhian method of political action captured the attention of the commons who could get a glimpse of what a non-violent movement was like' (K. P. Mishra 2012:206). Roy initiated the Right to Information Campaign that led to the enactment of the Right To Information act (RTI) in 2005 Hazare was also very active, in this, particularly in Maharashtra state. From this Gandhian root descends the AAP.

system in a rather direct form. However, most of the Gandhian activists and movements maintain an intentional distance from electoral politics and parties – the brightest amongst them and the most recent example is the absence of any official support from Anna Hazare to Arvind Kejriwal's political initiative, besides the latter previously being a close collaborator of the former.

As I was baffled with these questions, I also wondered about how I could find the appropriate comparative subjectivities in India and Italy, since these were the countries that would best serve the scope of the research combined with the theoretical framework and the practical context.

At the end of 2011, I was attracted by the political discourse of the recently founded M5S party-movement and from the level of spontaneity and engagement at the grassroots (Gianolla 2014). Some months later, an Indian friend living in Italy brought me a much-appreciated gift from his own country, the book *Swaraj* by Arvind Kejriwal; the AAP did not yet exist and Kejriwal was still the lieutenant of Anna Hazare. While the simplistic style of the book did not discourage me, its main ideas attracted my attention because they resonated with the ideas of Gandhi on democracy. The wave of social engagement against political corruption that was raised by Anna Hazare and the original political proposal that emerged with the creation of the AAP, made a good combination of subjectivities. In 2012, the M5S was still very local and achieved its first relevant political victories. Towards the end of the year the AAP was founded with the ambition to subvert political elitism and devolve political power to local communities.

Both political movements provided an interesting combination of elements that I considered to be central to the analysis. Starting from a Gandhian perspective: relationship of civil-society and the state, participation and decentralisation, reconceptualization of political leadership, and an approach to political theory based on a bottom-up perspective. Both movements emerged from: engagement of leaders who were previously immersed in civil society, leaders both making claims of a personal history of honest non-institutional

commitment and an ability to combine this with political novelty.¹⁷² I evaluated the concreteness of the project for 6-8 months before crystallising the research project by spring 2013, a time when the M5S was already a mass presence within the national parliament, while the AAP was still rising from outside the electoral field where it would achieve a great success later that December.

3.5.3 *Unpredictability and interest of the cases*

In the early stages of the research, existing criticism towards the AAP was relatively less prominent than enthusiasm about its potential. Meanwhile, the M5S faced different kinds of criticism at different stages and assumed a detractive label of being 'anti-political' and for having a negative acceptance of populism. I considered that both were being underestimated in terms of their democratic potential in both the mainstream political and academic debates. Throughout the four years of research work, there was an increase of criticism, something that I considered to be unavoidable as both movements increasingly institutionalised. I was aware that the dynamism of the M5S's and the AAP's structures, their provisional constitutions and rising political formations, the incompleteness of their political programmes and ideas and the translation of all of these features into political praxis would be a challenge for a study of these two emerging political subjectivities. I was also mindful that their transition from civil society to politics would mould and test their initial political discourses, but I pondered that this dynamism would be a burden for the workload not for the appropriateness of the study or for its consistency.

I have considered that assuming the perspective of the epistemologies of the South does not mean looking for romantic stories of success in the residual South. The epistemologies of the South are a critical theoretical framework for investigating the unavoidable incompleteness of social responses to the stiff oppression of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. I did not expect the AAP and the M5S to provide a comprehensive framework of response, as such an expectation would be audacious for a study on social

¹⁷² Both the AAP and the M5S are evocative subjectivities. The M5S was founded on 4 October (2009), the anniversary of Saint Francis 'birth in heaven', to demonstrate the movement's intention to maintain poverty as a moral reference for action. The AAP was founded on 26 November (2012), which is the anniversary of the adoption of Indian Constitution, to demonstrate the party's intention to maintain constitutional values, including the preamble, as the moral reference for action. The AAP maintains that the democratic arena in India is dominated by a corrupted elite and therefore the constitutional values are negated.

subjectivities within the theoretical framework of the epistemologies of the South. Moreover, that it would be an irresponsible and unprofessional starting point for any serious researcher who is open to reading the diversity of the world experience based on this theoretical framework in which empirical findings are foundational.

From the ambition of the theoretical framework to the potential dynamism of the empirical cases, I was aware of the several challenges the research would present. First of all, I was open to admit variations from the norm without considering it to be an exception but rather empirical evidence. I also knew that I could not use a rigid methodology and cast the case studies into equal analytical frameworks. Moreover, I was aware that the analytical frameworks needed to be able to account for surprising turns of event with respect to the two subjectivities. Such turns punctually occurred for the M5S, for instance, with regards to the various cases of expulsions (especially for the verticality of the decision) and the resignation of the three M5S MPs elected in Latina. Similarly, for the AAP, the Bharti and Bhushan-Yadav cases manifested contradictions of which I took note.

Inconsistency and flows of the AAP and the M5S contribute to the collection of three levels of empirical evidence: level 1 – ponder the limit of the democratic potential of the two subjectivities; level 2 – understand the defensive strength of the political-colonial regimes; and level 3 – envisage theoretical reformulations. Therefore, sub-research questions have constantly enriched the research, as well as created the challenge to limit the collection of empirical evidence within the fieldwork timeframe. Questioning increasingly targeted the way the party-movements responded to political challenges, which responses they provided and how these responses shaped their constitutions.

Alberoni theorised an over-reaching approach of the ‘movement and institution’. The movement phase, is a transition from the ‘nascent state’ – characterised by an enthusiastic, creative and alternative vision of the established order – to a return to the everyday ‘institutional’ order – in which the movement crystallises into a new *status quo* thereby losing its initial dynamism and reproducing forms voided of the revolutionary burst of the movement phase (Alberoni 2014). Before him, Robert Michels had elaborated on the ‘iron law of oligarchy’ of the political parties, after which oligarchic rule emerges as a self-reproducing dynamic and collective interest is subdued to party elites (Michels 1915). The AAP and the

M5S are party-movements, as they have emerged from society and are engaged in a political competition with the idea of bringing a fresh view of how to translate citizens' participation in public policies. Furthermore, they emerged as an innovative force typical of the 'nascent state'. I tested the AAP and the M5S against Alberoni and Michels' accounts, to be able to understand the crystallisation of internal elites and the role played by them. One question in the research is: what is the role played by leaders to enforce participation?

Throughout the research, I was puzzled by the increasing relevance of some concepts and political categories that more closely adapted to the two chosen movements. Of these, I had to give much more relevance than expected to populism, a category that gathered centrality in the research. Framing the question of populism for the party-movements, and doing so between expectation and delusion, prompted me to adopt a critical stance concerning the negative use of the term. Therefore, I explore its meanings in a wider participatory perspective.

3.5.4 *Intercultural challenges*

While the methodology adopts a comparative approach, at the theoretical level, the study of two diverse movements such as the AAP and the M5S is inflected in the political-philosophical framework based on Gandhi's democratic view through an exercise of intercultural translation. According to Santos, '[i]ntercultural translation is a tool to minimize the obstacles to political articulation among different social groups and movements fighting across the globe for social justice and human dignity when said obstacles are due to cultural difference and reciprocal unintelligibility' (Santos 2014:213).

Within this study, intercultural translation takes on a three level inflection as: a translation between Gandhi's theory and empirical engagement of the past with current struggles for democratisation; between two cultural backgrounds as diverse as India and Italy; and between two political movements with their own organisation and discourse. The translation is internal to the political theory, in that it engages within liberal democratic theory but it is external to it as is trying to encompass a new political imagination. This is represented by the participatory discourse of the two movements and based on the thoughts and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi. I humbly believe that if this work of translation has a merit it is that it

has identified that among these three poles there was ‘translatability’.¹⁷³ This is to say that translation among them would be fruitful for democratic theory. I identified this translatability before these party-movements had electoral success and independently from it (in 2012 when the project was initially drafted), although electoral successes are important for the study.

This theoretical approach frames two cultural horizons: one internal to the epistemological North (the M5S) and one external (Gandhi and the AAP). Although the M5S refers to Gandhi in general as the pacifist master without specific insights in his democratic theory, the theoretical connexion with Gandhi’s perspective on democracy is substantial. For instance, this is seen in the political discourse of the movement concerning devolution, participation, the local dimension, and the role of representatives as civil servants. The M5S does not incorporate the civilisational philosophy of Gandhi, nor is it closed to it, although it does lack the theoretical insight to explore its significance for democracy.

In light of this, the research offers an internal and external comparison of liberal democratic regimes, something that could hardly be achieved in a comparative study with European subjectivities (i.e., Podemos, Syriza or Pirate Party). In Italy, such a theoretical and political framework gives rise to institutional alternatives (i.e., the M5S). In India, the Gandhian cultural and political framework gives rise to an ‘institutional condensation’ that maintains a Gandhian discourse (i.e., the AAP – although other Gandhians criticise the perspective of the AAP).

In this study there are two levels of analysis: Italy and India. In the Indian case, Gandhi’s perspectives combine to critique colonial rule with the proposal of a Hindu civilisational alternative as a contribution to democratic theory. What do these two levels have

¹⁷³ Translatability is not simply related to political relevance but to the relevance of each pole with the other two and the need of engaging them, on a theoretical level based on empirical evidence, in the process of translation. Santos maintains that ‘[t]ranslatability is the acknowledgment of a difference and the motivation to deal with it’ (Santos 2014:216). The locus of the translation is based on physical or theoretical level but direct encounter of the actors of translation, translatability is a lived experience endogenous of the actual relation between the two. In the present thesis the locus of the translation is extraneous to them, for what concerns the M5S in relation to the AAP and Gandhi and for the AAP in relation with the M5S (not so for the AAP and Gandhi) and I make the theoretical work of translating empirical evidence in search of fragments of an alternative vision of democratisation. Starting from the criticism of political-colonialism, I adopt translation as ‘an intellectual exercise aimed at disproving well-accepted truths concerning the uniqueness or precedence of a given culture’ (Santos 2014:221) of democratic theory.

in common and in which way do they communicate? What emerges from the comparison of these two cases for democratic theory in the ground? The thesis starts from the point of view that, what is needed is not an alternative within the political paradigm, but rather, an alternative thinking of alternatives. Gandhi's perspective provides such an alternative because it evades the internal limit of the political discourse with his civilisational approach. How do the AAP and the M5S allow for the development of an alternative democratic thinking of alternatives? To these two movements what are betrayal, approximation, perversion, and fulfilment of alternative democratic thinking?

With this approach, the analysis includes an internal critique to the liberal democratic theory, accounting for criticism that is internal to the Western perspective, where the epistemological North is considered to be the champion of that theory and of its practice. I especially account for this internal critique in the first chapter, as this is where I cope with the 'boundary work, a ceaseless policing of borders and a persistent epistemological vigilance, in order to contain and repel the always allegedly imminent assaults of irrationality' including that towards non-scientific knowledge such as arts, humanities and religion (Santos et al. 2008:XXX). Gandhi breaks through these internal limits and moves towards an external expansion of democratic theory. The AAP attempts to take over the cultural dimension and participatory social traditions of India, thereby representing a cultural externality, while the M5S remains within the limits of Western political theory. The count of the three therefore provides an internal and external critical account of Western political theory.

The alternative to the liberal democratic theory concentrates mainly on a combination of representative and participative democracy. The M5S is a case for this. The limit of this approach is to generate reflection and prove theoretical validity considering the Western political, social, cultural and economic order, which, besides being non-homogeneous and rich of subaltern perspectives, is limited in relation to the perspectives of different cultures and civilisations. In my view and in different forms, the Pirates, Syriza, Podemos and the M5S, are all included in such a group of alternatives. These movements provide an internal response to the crisis of liberalism and propose an alternative in which there is a combination of participation and representation. They address the problem from the local scale and raise questions concerning the national level. Moreover, they emerge as a

critique of conventional liberal democracy in the very form they structure and organise themselves: be it for their cyber-participation (the M5S and the Pirates) or collectivist characteristic (Podemos and Syriza). Therefore, the M5S is in itself the outcome of the critique to political theory in the West.

The AAP and its cultural perspective provides a good comparative and intercultural counterpart to expand the focus of this analysis. This is because India is culturally less dependent on the West than other countries. The AAP again faces the challenge of scale, and expands it to the matchless complexity of the Indian context. Most importantly, the AAP contributes a non-Western cultural perspective to the critique of the liberal crisis. If liberal democratic regimes seem to favour the emergence of similar party-movements in different world regions, the responses of these parties to the liberal crises includes cultural-related differences. This means that in India, it cannot escape historical democratic issues such as caste discrimination and religious communalism.

While neither the M5S nor the AAP approach the political abyssal line as radically as Gandhi did, they make a situated attempt from which some common concerns emerge. The renovation of democratic theory emerging from the research envisages a reconceptualization of (shared) leadership, decentralisation, devolution, ethical standards of the political sphere, the role of the individual and the community, participation of the common people and the role of ideology. This kind of research, besides the methodological account provided in the relative chapter, is challenging due to its interdisciplinary approach. It includes, to varying degrees, sociology, political science and philosophy, and does so with a constructivist aim of identifying relevant concepts from the small evidence of the cases.

3.6 Hypothesis and working questions

3.6.1 Hypothesis

Liberal democratic regimes are systems that do not exhaust the democratic exercise as they implement forms of low-intensity democracy. One of the main limits of these regimes is political-colonialism, a system by which the political elite rules over society distributing political power vertically and creating an abyssal divide between the elite and society in terms of power holding. The consequence of the abyssal divide – in the political sphere – is social

exclusion and oppression that undermines equality. Gandhi's political philosophy opposes political-colonialism down to its root, propounding a philosophical alternative of the individual and their relation with the community and society in all its scales (including at the global level). He propounded an alternative vision of society radicalising horizontality in social relations and bringing duty and service to the core of politics.

Gandhi's ideas are taken up by activists and movements emerging in the global South as well as in the global North. No movement has been able to reiterate the complex and comprehensive message of Gandhi in its entirety, but different movements have concentrated on different aspects of Gandhi's perspective. Each of these attempts deserves to be respected and accurately analysed. This thesis considers two case studies that incorporate a vision of democracy that resonates with Gandhi's ideas.

The AAP identifies its political discourse with many aspects of Gandhi's proposal of decentralised and participatory democracy. The M5S provides a similar perspective although without rooting it in Gandhi's thinking. Both these movements provide a bottom-up response to the political crisis, provide a reshaping of the relationship between civil society and the state, put forward a different model of leadership, and bring participation to the centre of the democratic discourse. The AAP and the M5S can thus be understood as two cases partially incorporating Gandhi's perspectives on politics, bringing them within the contemporary political sphere of liberal democratic regimes and experimenting with them in different socio-political contexts.

A comparison between the AAP and the M5S is made possible because of the fact that these two party-movements both struggle against the oppression created by political-colonialism and defined by the political abyssal line. These movements propose conceptions of democracy that are coming from the margins (bottom-up) of the political system that they are contesting. This comparison is also enriching due to the different social, cultural and political backgrounds that exist between India and Italy. While in India there is a civilisational dimension deriving and attending to a Hindu worldview, in Italy there is a centrifugal response that originated in the crises of a particularly dynamic liberal democratic regime.

The epistemologies of the South provide a fertile structure on which to create the conditions of intercultural dialogue between Gandhi's ideas and the political achievements of the two case studies. Hypothetically, this dialogue produces a fruitful explanation of how liberal democratic regimes can increase their quality (in terms of converting vertical relations of power into relations of shared authority) or how it is possible to achieve forms of high-intensity democracy, however incomplete and dynamic. The evidence should be seen as a direct observation of the AAP's and the M5S's achievements, as well as an analysis of their failures in order to envisage further democratisation processes. The empirical response they provide and the very form the AAP and the M5S take on while attaining political achievements are also relevant results in this research.

In the theoretical framework presented here, Gandhi provided a civilisational response with which to establish an intercultural dialogue in order to foresee alternative democratic regime forms to political-colonialism and its practices, methods and theories, in order to be able to move the political abyssal line. Gandhi accomplished a tectonic movement of the political abyssal line, while the AAP and the M5S foresee a slight movement of the political abyssal line. The evidence presented in this study shines a light on the struggle against political-colonialism in order to envisage paths of democratisation for liberal democratic regimes and their political theory.

3.6.2 *Research Questions*

The main research question investigates the nature and features of theories and practices aimed at democratising democracy as it is framed in political theory, regimes and grassroots forms. The theoretical chapters return a critical assessment of liberal democratic theory, describe its critical characterisation as political-colonialism and advance viewpoints to decolonise political theory and regime forms through the perspective of Gandhi contextualised in different political struggles by the epistemologies of the South.

A number of more concrete research questions have permitted the research to advance and the results to be structured. Throughout the analysis, some questions found responses while others found a systematisation that they could be entered into at the end. In light of the epistemologies of the South, the basic orientation of the questioning is sustained by the idea of democracy as democratisation, that is, an ongoing process of translating vertical

power relations into relations of shared authority. With such a theoretical orientation, evident and concealed questions include:

- What is the role of political leadership in a theory of democracy that aims at fracturing the political abyssal line dividing elites from society?
- To what extent do the AAP and the M5S take up Gandhi's postcolonial political vision?
- To what extent do the AAP and the M5S move the political abyssal line by producing practices of higher intensity democracy?
- What resources and methods of democratisation do the AAP and the M5S mobilise in their effort to move the political abyssal line?
- How do the AAP and the M5S break with the duality of state and civil society in order to increase democratic self-government?
- What are the major points of contact and difference between the AAP and the M5S in terms of their political form, discourse and action to shift the political abyssal line?
- What is the impact of institutionalisation and what is its implication in the internal structures in the democratisation potential of the AAP and the M5S?
- What alternative to the AAP's and the M5S' limits and shortcomings would imply a more radically democratic response?
- How do alternatives to the AAP's and the M5S' limits and shortcomings inform a higher-intensity form of democratisation?
- What major perspective for the theory of democratisation emerged from the research?
- What are the mutual learning dynamics of the two cases in response to their respective contexts? What can these two movements learn from each other in light of the post-abysal thinking following the analysis?
- What major theoretical lessons do the AAP and the M5S return to the epistemologies of the South in their dialogue with Gandhi's political thinking to democratise democracy?

4 Contexts and background information on the cases

This chapter introduces the context of the empirical research by providing background information in relation to the case studies and the socio-political trajectory of India and Italy as far as it is relevant for the research. The first part contextualises the emergence of the *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP – Party of the Common Person) in India and the second part analyses the context and emergence of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S – 5 Star Movement) in Italy.

4.1 India and the Aam Aadmi Party

The theoretical part of this thesis is highly informed by Gandhi's theories, reflections and actions. It involves a crucial period in the history of India – spanning over the three decades in which Gandhi was the foremost important political figure of the country. Accounts for the rich history of India in recent decades is a work that many historians brings forward with audacity, starting with the scholars of the subaltern study group. The scope of these few pages is to account for the political culture from which the AAP emerged, bridging the time since Gandhi's assassination to recent decades and providing a background of few relevant aspects of India's recent history and political and social thought.

4.1.1 *India, civilisation democracy and modernity*

Gandhi engaged in Indian politics through a civilisational perspective realising that the project of political homogeneity typical of Western polities was inadequate for his subcontinent. As discussed in previous sections, he developed an intra and inter-civilisational perspective that he regarded as a richness for the world in the democratic debate. Besides the different path taken by *India after Gandhi* in which it embraced an industrial model of progress with state-centrism political institutions, the cogency of the civilisational perspective is no less concrete or valid than before. The literature on India's trajectory after independence is vast and has been dealt with by several historians, among them Ramachandra Guha (2008) who has provided a brilliant account with a fine narrative and comprehensive thematic perspective.

Ravinder Kumar (2002) analyses the history of Indian civilisation and he structurally characterises India as a 'civilisation-state' as opposed to as a 'nation-state' because it is characterised by heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. Kumar excavates the origin of

Indian heterogeneity in its Hindu history, identifying the root of social organisation in the stratification of the caste system that combines with the religious epic unity of the four *varnas* and the local segregation of the innumerable *jatis*. With its religious and historical background India incorporates unity and diversity along with tolerance and contradictions. The Indian political system was historically loose, characterised by a union of diverse states giving India a tripartite political structure:

There came into existence at this stage three distinct, yet related, levels of political activity within India: local level, which was characterised by the dispersal in space of distinct jati and jana [clan] communities; a regional level, shaped through interaction between local polities; and a pan-Indian level, holding the country as a whole in a loose confederation. These three levels of political activity underpinned state-formation within India until the nineteenth century, notwithstanding substantive changes in modes of social production or in the structure of society. [...] The pan-Indian polity remained a relatively weak institution until the establishment of the British Empire over India. Indeed, prior to the nineteenth century, the political history of the subcontinent was largely characterised by a dialogue between the regional states on the one hand, and between local and regional polities on the other (Kumar 2002:19).

British Colonial rule, with its necessity to control territory and people, stiffened the social organisation and subverted the logic of intra-civilisation relations. Against this subversion, Gandhi struggled in propounding a civilisational response to the colonisers and their aggressive political system. Kumar underlines that while Semitic religions are internally cohesive with referential texts defining religious belief, Hinduism is open to conflicting notions of moral order oriented by different schools of thought, something that was propaedeutic for the later inclusion of Islamic and Christian views in Indian civilisation, a process in which Gandhi played a great role. In other words, 'Indian civilisation acquired its distinctive character through a combination of the social, economic, political and cultural processes which underpinned its totality rather than through any one of these processes taken singly' (Kumar 2002:20). Kumar's account here explains the civilisational alternative emerging from its history.

Reason and liberal ideals brought by Western modernisation impacted the Indian elite and played a role in the rise against colonial rule. These, however, did not subvert the civilisational landscape of the subcontinent and the tension between a national identity and the consciousness of diversity and solidarity endured the liberation struggle. The role of Gandhi and the Congress was to bond the country across differences and achieve such a unity

through cultural, economic and religious diversity, something that was achieved apart from the unwanted partition from Pakistan. The Congress as a moral and political entity was strengthened by the cohesion of the liberation struggle and shaped the political structure of the country after independence.

The constitution of India, adopted in 1950, initially incorporated the principle of colonial time (Government of India Act 1935) and ideals of freedom and equality fostered by the liberation struggle. It also included the spirit of devolution and local participatory forms (article 40), but these were left to the states to take action on them. However, the 73rd and 74th amendments¹⁷⁴ of the constitution in 1993 incorporated positive provisions under the *panchayati raj*, besides other attempts that had been done in the past.¹⁷⁵

The introduction of the *panchayati raj* certainly reflects an openness to Gandhi's vision of decentralised politics, but it is also problematic especially because it is instigated top-down from the central government. It fostered a change of politics that was orchestrated by the political elite and indeed it was not demanded by a grassroots movement but rather was introduced as a constitutional top-down amendment (deSouza 2003:102), points which partially explains its substantial failure to introduce consistent devolution in the country. Besides being an endogenous process of Indian politics, it was enacted in contemporaneity with the emergence of neoliberal politics. Mathur (2013:XIII–XXIX) maintains that under a neoliberal agenda the state needed to be lighter, less bureaucratic and devolve its competences to the market and civil society thereby affirming the transition from government to governance. In this view, decentralisation is understood as a form to improve management

¹⁷⁴ The 73rd amendments concerns the *panchayati raj* in rural India while the 74th amendments concerns urban decentralisation in municipalities.

¹⁷⁵ The *panchayati raj* system is based on Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* that was referring back to traditional village communities. The Indian constitution drafting committee, headed by Ambedkar, did not foresee the entry of the *panchayat* structure due to a number of reasons. These included the fact that at the time Gandhian political ideas were considered unrealistic, there were internal and external tensions in India and a strong centre was considered more suitable to keep the country united and also community life was considered caste-racist. Article 40 was added to the constitution as the result of a compromise between the followers of Gandhi and Ambedkar, however this succinct article merely suggests that the state organise village *panchayats* and that it devolves to them powers to strengthen self-government (Mathur 2013:8–11). Before the *panchayati raj* amendments to the constitution other attempts were made in independent India to strengthen local democratic dynamics. Nehru's Community Development Programme (CDP) is one such example. All the attempts to date have faced concrete difficulties in bringing about democratic decentralisation. The *panchayati raj* system, with its uneven and bureaucratic implementation, being controlled by the centre and not devolved to the local level, is no exception.

and quality of service delivery as opposed to increase democratic quality. This approach became chaotic when the intertwining of governance included other institutions and non-state actors in the delivery of 'the services' previously delivered by the state, a process which led to the weakening of *panchayats* as institutions. The political motivation of decentralisation engages 'primarily within the discourse of development. Other discourses that are a part of the decentralization initiative, such as democracy, federalism, law, equity, and justice, should be seen as supportive discourses' (deSouza 2003:104).

While the constitutional provision formally structures the system of devolution, it specifies that the Indian states would singularly define their functions and competences (included in the 11th schedule of the constitution). Despite this, 'states did not go along with the spirit of the Constitution in creating institutions of local self-government, and, consequently, the panchayats continue to suffer from this inadequacy' (Mathur 2013:XXIV). In the absence of a provision to enforce the system, the constitutional amendments remain void and the overlapping of national, state and private ruling undermines the competences of the local self-governments. For example, '[t]he gram sabha [village assembly] in most states have been entrusted with only ceremonial functions' (Goel and Rajneesh 2009:36), and *panchayats* serve to entrust a local elite dependent from the central establishment.¹⁷⁶ Kerala is the most successful and renowned state in terms of the implementation of the *panchayati raj* (Heller, Harilal, and Chaudhuri 2007; Heller and Isaac 2005; Ramakantan 2009; Saxena 2015; Sebastian 2008), but the system was executed unevenly, it lacks administrative support and in many cases it serves mostly the legitimization of elites more than as a real and effective participatory instrument.¹⁷⁷

Along the seven decades of independence the political map of India has been amended many different times. A profound reorganisation occurred in 1956 when more

¹⁷⁶ The figures relative to the *panchayati raj* in 2003 are eloquent of the impact on the political system. The number of new institutions created is as follow: '227.698 village councils (*gram panchayats*) at the base, 5,906 block councils (*panchayat samitis*) above these, and 474 district councils (*zila parishads*) at the top' and the number of new representatives is '500 or more members of Parliament and nearly 5,000 state representatives approximately three million new elected representatives' (deSouza 2003:99–100).

¹⁷⁷ In the empirical chapter dedicated to the AAP there will be a deeper analysis, including interviews collected at the grassroots, concerning the *panchayati raj* its potential and criticism (Jayanandam and Narasaiah 2014; see also Reddy 2014; Saxena 2015; Thakre 2015).

attention was assigned to the linguistic, ethnic and cultural characteristics. This first re-arrangement reverted the organisation of the British who had arranged the country in sub-communities ‘partly out of ignorance and partly also in pursuit of a policy of “divide and rule”’ (Kumar 2002:27). The socio-cultural complexity of the country cannot be understood or condensed in any sort of easy homogeneity, and this explains the challenges and contradictions that the ‘Father of the Nation’ incorporated in his democratic vision proposing *swaraj* as a response.

Kothari is as critical of Indian democracy as he is convinced that the future of the country will be characterised by democratisation because the cultural democratic tradition of its peoples is extremely strong. He opposes the view that tradition and democracy are irreconcilable, and opposes the ‘*monoculture of logic of the dominant scale*. According to this logic, the scale adopted as primordial determines the irrelevance of all other possible scales’ (Santos 2014:173). Kothari reiterates that the failure in such a scale for a country like India does not mean that India is not fit for democracy, but rather, that this kind of liberal democracy is not fit for India because it implements a system of political-colonialism in which the notion of modernity is manipulated against the democratic progress of Indian peoples. Kothari responds to questions about how India endured democracy and how it resisted internal divisions, separatist movements and economic challenges by saying:

These questions are, no doubt, real and genuine. But in part they continue to be posted because their misplaced theoretical simplicity - that there is an inherent antithesis between democracy and aspects like tradition, economic backwardness, strong parochial identities and low development indices of modernisation (literacy, urbanisation, exposure to mass media, and the spread of rationality and scientific values and temper). If we accept such standardised conception as essential "prerequisites" of democracy, India is bound to be a deviant case, as has been argued from both the right and the left, in modern western thought. These arguments ignore the great relevance of tradition and culture to imparting depth and resilience to a democratic polity.

India is a deviant case in a much more fundamental sense – most threats to democracy in India arise from the sector that promotes modernity. The Pursuit of state power by this sector crushes traditional pluralities in an effort to turn the country into a modern, united, prosperous and powerful economy and polity. The real threats come from the social strata that are found to be working for this “modern” enterprise, from those very centres of power and expertise that are destabilising Indian traditions and the vast populace that is still steeped in those traditions. It is only because of the great appeal for large masses of the people of the idea of democracy, and of the need to struggle for it, that the country continues to be democratic. Therefore, while India may suffer reverses and occasionally experience widespread civil strife or even an authoritarian backlash, its future as a democracy is assured (Kothari 2005:16–17).

The ‘biggest democracy in the world’¹⁷⁸ is a cradle of languages, religions, castes, classes, ethnicities, and social interests and therefore it is difficult to summarise these simply in figures and models. DeSouza refers to these different societal categories through the consideration of scale as he explains that to study democracy in India the question of scale is unavoidable, as ‘[s]cale underscores the point that one cannot transform a societal space of such proportions without lapses, excesses, insufficiencies, failures, perhaps even disproportionate development’ (deSouza 2000:207). Amongst other reasons why India is extremely enriching in the perspective of the epistemologies of the South is precisely its societal trans-scalar dimensions both in relation to the spatial and temporal spectrum. ‘The need to extend democratic debate and democratic control of these different domains of social life beyond the national context raises other pressing questions on the capacity of extant democratic institutions and practices to deal with the effects of economic, political and cultural globalization’ (Santos and Nunes 2004b:7). To engage with political theory in India implies dealing with a complex intertwine of opposite pressures, small and big dimensions, with stakes toward the past, present and future that make it all the more interesting to understand how power can be shared beside all these cleavages.

4.1.2 *The political system of Independent India*

Peter Ronald deSouza (2000:213ss) identifies three phases of development of the political system in India after independence. The first is what Kothari defined the ‘system of *one party dominance*. [...] It is a competitive party system but one in which the competing parts play rather dissimilar roles. It consists of a *party of consensus* and *parties of pressure*’ (Kothari 1964:1162, see also 1967). Kothari clarifies the distinction with the one-party system, as there exist other ‘parties of pressure’, that had no capacity to constitute an alternative but served to put pressure, criticize and influence the Congress party. In substance the *pressure* controlled and fostered the Congress democracy. This system lasted for two decades after independence.

¹⁷⁸ The figures of the last general elections (2014) provide an idea of the size of the liberal democratic regime. There were 464 parties participating in elections with 8251 candidates (of which 668 were women, 62 of them were elected amounting to 11,4% representation), 927.553 polling stations (on average one for 1200-1400 electors), 834 million registered electors with a rising turnout that reached 66,44% (Election Commission of India 2015).

The second phase lasted over three decades and is defined as the government-opposition phase, as it ‘saw the emergence of genuine competition to the Congress, both at the state and at the national level, often aided by electoral waves.’ (Yadav 1996:99). In this phase, the congress remained the core of the party system and retained power, influence and popular support, although doing so with a reduction of electoral success. ‘Multiple bi-polarities’ were consolidated in different states but not yet at the national level and the Congress remained one of the poles in all the different states. This phase ended at the beginning of the 1990s with a change of epoch marked by the ‘demolition of Babri masjid,¹⁷⁹ inauguration of the New Economic Policy [neoliberalism] and the departure of the last charismatic leader of the Nehru dynasty [Rajiv Gandhi]’ (Yadav 1996:95).

The third phase fractioned politics at the national level with the consolidation of the bi-polarity Congress – the BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party* – Indian People's Party) acting as the main party of two coalitions coupled with the political prominence of smaller regional parties that aligned with them and that were electorally relevant for their success. The new stage is therefore characterised by the emergence of the BJP as the national competitor of the Congress party while being composed of an increased fragmentation of political affiliation that was diversified in the different states.

The third phase introduces five significant political consequences that deSouza (2000:214–16) outlines with clarity and they are extremely relevant to this study because they produce the condition that led to the emergence of the AAP. The first consequence concerns a trans-scalar rearrangement of political discourses that is due to the intensification of the party relations at the national level (Congress and BJP) with the regional ones. Political issues at the national level are increasingly combined with states’ demands and as a result, national and state interests intertwine. The second consequence is the rise of contrasts in ideological

¹⁷⁹ The communal tension between Hindus and Muslims had a turning point in the Ayodhya dispute. *Babri Masjid* was a mosque built by Moguls in the XVI century in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Hindus argue that it was located on the birthplace of the Hindu Lord Rama. The long dispute opposed Hindus and Muslims concerning the precedent existence of the Hindu temple on the place of the mosque and it was burned by Hindu nationalists in the 1980s. In 1992 the mosque was demolished by a mob of Hindu activists mobilised with the support of different Hindu nationalist organisations such as *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP – World Hindu Council) the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS – National Volunteers Association) and the political support of the BJP. As a consequence, a number of communal riots and terrorist attacks followed the event provoking thousands of deaths in different cities across India.

tendencies because pragmatism and openness to political compromise of the national political line is combined with the ideological chauvinism of smaller regional parties in order to secure electoral banks. Moreover, regional polarisation increases with the increase of the party system and challenges the stability of the party system itself.¹⁸⁰ The third consequence of the political changes occurred in the third phase of the Indian political system saw the number of political leaders increase along with the number of parties and this emergence led to an increased tendency of mobility between different parties. DeSouza affirms:

[T]hese are mainly political entrepreneurs who see politics as the new economic opportunity. They are the fixers of politics. They represent both the petitioners and policy-makers. They move the files and are responsible for the erosion of institutions. The culture of rule-abidingness, so necessary for the health of institutions and which promotes the "common good", stands no chance of developing when it has to engage with this kind of political entrepreneurship. These middle-level leaders have brought a new cynicism to politics. This can be illustrated by the defections and splits that have characterised party politics in parliament and in the state assemblies across the country. To accommodate these middle-level leaders, parties have had to offer them plum positions within the state apparatus. Each is given a fiefdom which becomes the basis of his or her patronage network. They have little accountability. Hence, competition generates the democratic paradox, in that it creates on the one hand a new strata of political leaders who emerge because of the extension of the polity, but these produce on the other hand an agenda of politics that is damaging to the culture of impersonality so necessary for democratic institutions. While competition may promote greater accountability of leaders in the long term, in the short term it encourages them to be less accountable (deSouza 2000:215).

The paradox elucidated by deSouza above explains why the political crisis in India is different than what has happened elsewhere. In other countries (including Italy) the voter turnout undergoes a steady reduction as one of the outcomes of dissatisfaction with the political elite, but in India the crisis has been paralleled with an increase in voter turnout. This is due to the increased and varied offer in the political market that on the other hand increased corruption and patronage. Indeed, deSouza underlines that the rise in electoral turnout (a steady increase since independence) and the anti-incumbency trend which generates a constant change of government, is a statement of a country that is for democratic politics. This democratic dynamic has received statistical confirmation from the numbers

¹⁸⁰ In 1991-92 the distribution of seats in the lower chamber of parliament between national vs. state parties at the national general elections was 478/51 seats. From 1996 it raised almost steadily and in 2014 it reached the proportion of 342/182, this figure confirming the role played by state parties, although the BJP won an absolute majority (282) in these elections and the Congress the opposite, collecting its worst historical result (44).

collected throughout the transition in the three phases described above.¹⁸¹ In other words, the rise of voter turnout coupled with anti-incumbency and leadership mobility provides three important figures: the inner democratic spirit of Indian polity, the fallacy of the political system in terms of corruption and patronage and the confirmation of the political crisis or the crisis of political liberalism (as seen above).

The market of political leadership brings the lack of accountability. Guha points out that in most political parties there is a family rule, most politicians are corrupt and have a criminal background, and civil servants are not independent (Guha 2008:749). The loss of political coherence and moral standards by the political elite, united with the tension created by three decades of neoliberal politics produced the fervent terrain for the emersion of the Right to Information (RTI) and the India Against Corruption (IAC) campaigns¹⁸². The fact that the leaders of the two campaigns are Gandhians (Aruna Roy and Anna Hazare among others) is a paradigmatic response.

Fourthly, deSouza highlights the positive role played by the election commission, an independent institution that controls and implements the articulated task of conducting elections in India. Since independence, it has assumed and confirmed an overlapping consensus and social prestige as the most trusted institution of the country. It has disciplined political parties imposing some measures of internal democracy, such as the obligation to hold internal elections in order to be able to put forward candidatures. These measures are not sufficient to grant that parties are transparent and democratic, but it is certainly a contribution.

The fifth and last consequence of the new phase of the Indian party system is related to the rise of the BJP, which for deSouza was due to misgovernance by the Congress party and to the fact that the BJP proposed a different agenda and political discourse based on Hindu

¹⁸¹ The following is the year of general elections followed by registered electors in millions and the percentage of turnout: 1951 (173,2; 45,57%); 1957 (193,7; 47,76%); 1962 (216,4; 55,42%); 1967 (249,0; 61,33); 1971 (274,2; 55,29); 1977 (321,2; 60,49); 1980 (356,2; 56,92); 1984-85 (400,3; 64,01); 1989 (498,9; 61,95); 1991-92 (511,5; 55,88); 1996 (592,6; 57,94); 1998 (605,9; 61,97); 1999 (619,5; 59,99); 2004 (671,5; 57,98); 2009 (717,0; 58,19); 2014 (834,0; 66,44) (Election Commission of India 2015).

¹⁸² These campaigns represent the national outcome of a grassroots work of mobilisation carried on by Gandhian Activists. More on these campaigns can be found in this chapter and in the empirical chapter on the AAP.

nationalism that found a readiness among the people to try the change. DeSouza reinforces how the nationalist and communal character of this party has reinvigorated, within the national politics, issues that the country had taken for granted with independence. Issues such as multiculturalism and secularism are re-opened to debate, especially with the *Hindutva* (Hinduness) chauvinist view, the official ideology of the party.

A last note on the emergence of regional parties also concerns the AAP. While state parties collect votes only in some states, national parties compete in elections in more states. While the AAP received a positive result in the election in Delhi in 2013, it was a political audacity of the party-movement to jump to the immense national competition within few months in 2014 and the results of the election generated disillusion.¹⁸³ Consequently, the AAP focused again to Delhi and in 2015 won the election with an unrepresented result. Now the party is scaling up with caution in other states, preparing to compete in states' elections only when it considers that success is achievable, e.g., Punjab state is one such case.

4.1.3 *The emergence of the AAP*

The AAP is a party-movement mainly rooted in the state of Delhi and increasingly present in other Indian states such as Punjab, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Its main leader, Arvind Kejriwal, chose social activism as a life vocation after quitting an engineering post at Tata Steel in 1992 and then the Indian Revenue Service (IRS a branch of the Indian Civil Service – ICS) in 2006. As a public servant of the IRS he saw and understood the mechanism of corruption from the inside but could do little to counter this from within (Bacani 2007; Sachdeva 2014:25–28). While he was still working in the civil service he was active in social movements related to the transparency of governance, anti-corruption, assistance of local communities in accessing governmental schemes, transparency and redistribution of public funding, legal support to people's demands and against cases of corruption in the public administration. He struggled against public-private partnerships, international capitalism (World Bank) and government venture, especially for primary goods such as water (Bhaduri and Kejriwal 2005).

¹⁸³ For an analysis of the performance of the AAP in the Lok Sabha Election of 2014 see (Aashish 2014).

Kejriwal's interest in grassroots services originated in a few volunteering experiences he had in the early 1990s¹⁸⁴ and through his struggle against corruption that concretised into the movement 'Parivartan' (meaning 'change' in Hindi) which he co-founded in 1999.¹⁸⁵ During his volunteering and activist experiences Kejriwal developed a spiritual vocation for social service which he concretised with the Vipassana meditation (the non-sectarian meditation technics of Buddha's tradition) that he learned in 1997 and has practiced ever since.

Kejriwal cooperated with the grassroots movement the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS - Workers and Farmers Power Union or the Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) which was coordinated by Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh in Rajasthan. He joined the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI, headed by the MKSS), which objective was to obtain the Right to Information (RTI) at the national level in order to extend governmental transparency and reduce corruption. Kejriwal learned the MKSS's techniques of public audits and imported them to Delhi (Baviskar 2010). He was awarded the renowned 'Ramon Magsaysay Award' for emergent leadership in 2006 and solidified his reputation at the national level during the 'India Against Corruption' (IAC) campaign in 2011. Headed by the Gandhian social activist Anna Hazare, the IAC promoted the *jan lokpal* bill demanding the institution of an independent ombudsperson entitled to investigate corruption cases at the national level. Hazare, along with other social activists in India (especially those who follow the austere example of Gandhi), practices a non-institutional politicisation of civil society and maintain a formal distance from party-politics. The fracture between Kejriwal and Hazare was a rupture between two visions of political action within the IAC:

Hazare and Kejriwal agreed on September 19, 2012 that their differences regarding a role in politics were irreconcilable. Kejriwal had support from some anti-corruption movement activists, such as Prashant Bhushan and Shanti Bhushan, but was opposed by others, such

¹⁸⁴ Such as in Calcutta with Mother Theresa, with the Christian Brothers Association, Ramakrishna Missions and the Nehru Yuva Kendra (Nehru Youth Centre) between 1991 and 1992 (Bacani 2007).

¹⁸⁵ Kejriwal founded Parivartan in 1999 with Kailash Goduka and Colonel J. N. Pandey. Manish Sisodia (the AAP deputy Chief Minister of Delhi in the first two mandates), was the first volunteer of the movement and Madhu Bhaduri (founding member of the AAP who resigned from the party in early 2014) would later join. The year before Kejriwal founded KABIR (Karmayogis Association for Bringing Indian Regeneration), an association against corruption related to electricity bills, but this enterprise was not successful due to his over expectations (Bacani 2007; Sachdeva 2014:29–35).

as Kiran Bedi and Santosh Hegde. On October 2, Kejriwal announced that he was forming a political party and that he intended to formally launch it on November 26, coinciding with the anniversary of India's adoption of its Constitution in 1949 (Biju 2015; see also Sachdeva 2014:71).

After several years of social activism, Kejriwal collected and organised the struggle of those who believed that it was appropriate to step in the political party field. He created the AAP in Delhi on 26 November 2012 together with many colleagues of the IAC and others. It was an opportune moment in Indian society as the wave of moralisation had invaded the political debate and the AAP became the anti-corruption party *par excellence*. The merit of the IAC campaign was questioned as it collected the disappointment of Indian civil society with its representative establishment and renewal of the validity and centrality of Gandhian methods of protest and politics (K. P. Mishra 2012:206). The wave of the moralisation of politics united to the participatory approach are summarised in the concept of *swaraj* or self-rule, which was central to Gandhi and which is the basic concept upon which the AAP built its political discourse. This started with Kejriwal's book (2012) and the *Aam Aadmi* which literally means 'common man' (also understood as 'common person'), and it goes back to the concept of *Hind Swaraj* (Gandhi 1938), although Gandhi is mentioned only in the foreword by Anna Hazare.

The idea of *swaraj* carried on by the AAP is simplified by the model villages of Ralegan Siddhi (dynamited and reinvigorated by Anna Hazare) and Hiware Bazar (studied and documented by Kejriwal in 2009) (KABIR 2011; interview Papat Rao Pawar). The *surpanch* (or leader of the village executive council), Papat Rao Pawar (interview), reasserts the inspirational centrality of Gandhi for both the village and for Kejriwal. The political dimension of the AAP is expanded over urban communities with the same criteria adopted in the village, this time with the *Mohalla Sabha* (neighbourhood council) instead of the *Gram Sabha* (village council).

The electoral debut of the AAP came with a surprising success of 28 out of 70 seats in state of Delhi assembly election of 2013 (29,5% share of the vote). The inability of the BJP, that had won 32 seats, to form a government caused the AAP to at first reject any proposal to make a coalition with them, a decision which stayed in line with their anti-system critique (Ali 2013a, 2013b). However, after increasing social pressure, the AAP leadership decided to

consult the electorate to decide the way ahead (Ali 2013c; Pandey 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). They eventually formed a government with the external support of the Congress party on the basis of an 18 point governmental programme put forward by the AAP (PTI 2013b). The AAP's first mandate lasted 49 days and corresponded with the peak of the 'AAP effect' at national level. Other parties adapted their discourse to the AAP's wave of moral renovation, in particular with a rhetoric against political corruption and in favour of people's participation. Kejriwal and his government resigned on 14 February 2014 when other parties did not allow the debate of the *jan lokpal bill* in the state assembly with bureaucratic arguments. People and the media were shocked and confused by this rushed decision by Kejriwal. Three months later, the AAP took a hasty step forward by contesting 432 seats out of 543 at the national elections in which the party-movement obtained only a 2,1% share of the vote and elected just four national representatives (Aashish 2014). Less than a year later, on 8 February 2015, the party once more surprised by winning 67 out of 70 seats in the next Delhi state Assembly election, with a 54.3% share of the vote (TNN 2015c).

The democratic vision of the AAP resonates with the tradition of the freedom struggle as it makes a reference to the preamble of the Indian constitution and recalls the spirit of *Hind Swaraj*. In this way, the AAP has mobilised the democratic virtue of the freedom struggle against the decadence of the political system. The party states:

Millions of martyrs including Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Afshaq Ullah, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Ram Prasad Bismil, Mangal Pandey, sacrificed their lives to free the nation. Did they sacrifice their lives so that our own people should plunder the country instead of the British? These gallant freedom fighters envisaged an India that is described in the preamble of our Constitution (Aam Aadmi Party 2012:1).

The AAP's anti-colonial stand resonates with the momentum of the freedom struggles it also rejects the continuation of the system that was initiated during colonial times. They take over Gandhi's notion of *swaraj* as an alternative form of democracy with respect to the liberal democratic regime. Indeed they affirm '[w]e wanted an independent India, but continued with the rules, regulations and laws from the British era' (Aam Aadmi Party 2012:2). The reference to the preamble of the constitution makes a direct evocation of moral principles underlying the relationship that the AAP's discourse claims. The principles of *Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* are taken from the Indian constitutional preamble and have been

placed into the AAP's constitution (article II / Objectives of the Party) (Aam Aadmi Party 2014a Article II).

The AAP translates the Indian democratic translation based on a Gandhian perspective into one emergent political discursive instance in order to renovate the Indian political debate, combining an emancipatory perspective of the past and of the future. Their success in Delhi demonstrates that this proposal is not obsolete but rather actually relevant and resonating with the people.

Setting such high moral standard implies opening themselves up to a high level of scrutiny and severe criticism. As it is to be expected, the AAP's political enterprise is no easy attempt. A study of the challenges, dynamics, and responses provided to old and new political issues represents a need for democratic innovations. To understand the constraints experienced by a practical translation of Gandhi's view in political instances within a political-colonial system that the Mahatma himself had wished to circumvent, requires an audacity to critically examine the party-movement without reverence but also without the tendency to disqualify it too easily.

4.2 Italy and the Movimento 5 Stelle

The Italian political system is a great laboratory compared to other more stable Western liberal democratic regimes, as its party system is dynamic and instable. The M5S emerged as a political movement at the margin of such a system with a peculiar aggregative form centred on the Internet, the instrument that gives the movement its uniqueness in the Italian political landscape. In order to understand the M5S it is opportune to first have an overview of the Italian political system over the last two or three decades.

4.2.1 *Paradigmatic changes of Italian politics*

Between the end of the 1980s and the middle of the 1990s the Italian political party system underwent a profound reshaping. This was due to international events such the decline of the Soviet Union as accelerated by the fall of the Berlin wall, something which especially impacted the Italian Communist Party (PCI – *Partito Comunista Italiano*) and led to two series of domestic events. The first relates to the killings of anti-mafia judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino which took place at the peak of the war between the Italian state

and the Mafia and led to new political relations among the two (Bolzoni 2012). The second concerns the corruption scandals that emerged with the investigations that were named ‘*mani pulite*’ (clean hands). These investigations led to political turmoil between 1992 and 1994. The resulting crisis of the old political parties produced a disaggregation of the Christian Democracy (DC – *Democrazia Cristiana*), Italian Socialist Party (PSI – *Partito Socialista Italiano*) Italian Republican Party (PRI – *Partito Repubblicano Italiano*), Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI – *Partito Sociale Democratico Italiano*), Italian Liberal Party (PLI – *Partito Liberale Italiano*), and the Italian Social Movement (MSI – *Movimento Sociale Italiano*) (Morlino 1996; Pasquino 1994; Valbruzzi 2013). The PCI had already transformed into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS – *Partito Democratico Della Sinistra*) and the Communist Refoundation (*Rifondazione Comunista*), while from the rest of the spectrum emerged a number of other parties, such as: Forward Italy (FI – *Forza Italia*), National Alliance (AN – *Alleanza Nazionale*), Christian Democratic Centre (CCD – *Centro Cristiano Democratico*), Italian Popular Party (PPI – *Partito Popolare Italiano*), Democratic Alliance (AD – *Alleanza Democratica*) and others. The re-engineering of the party system strengthened recent political formations such as the North League (LN – *Lega Nord*) that propounded an anti-establishment and secessionist discourse.

Although the constitution did not formally change, the political constitution was radically impacted and for this reason the term ‘second republic’ is used to identify the period between the early 1990s to date.¹⁸⁶ The person of Silvio Berlusconi, FI leader and four time prime minister of Italy, iconizes the second republic. Initially he was the new face of the political landscape and was able to polarise consensus and opposition on a personal as well as political level. This phase was strongly characterised by political patronage and contraposition of corruption and anti-establishment sentiments.

As the centrality of Silvio Berlusconi declined under the influence of internal discontent, neoliberal politics, and the economic crisis (Morlino and Piana 2014; Morlino and

¹⁸⁶ Some scholars refer to the ‘third republic’ (Giannuli 2014b, 2014a) or to the ‘third phase of the Italian republic’ (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2015) to indicate the time since the early-mid 2010s with the end of the party system established in the 1990s. Scholars do not agree on the use of the definition of second republic because there was no constitutional change (Valbruzzi 2013), however the academic and journalistic discourse widely integrate this acceptance while the ‘third republic’ is incipient and much less sanctioned.

Quaranta 2016), the technocratic government of Mario Monti was formed in 2011. Besides the good performance of the FI in the 2013 national elections, the Italian party system entered into a new structural transformation. In 2007 the centre-left parties of the Daisy (Margherita) and the Democrats of the Left (DS – *Democratici di Sinistra*) merged into the Democratic Party (PD – *Partito Democratico*) which became the newest big party of the country, especially with the emergence of the leadership of Matteo Renzi in 2014. The M5S was instrumental to the advent of this political change and characterises its visionary entrance in the political scene first as a movement and second as an institutional (party) formation, in a way that coincides to what Giovanni Sartori had wished (Sartori 2007).¹⁸⁷

Leader centralism has characterised the second republic and continues to be characteristic of the Italian party system after the new transition occurred in 2013 (Musella 2014; Pasquino 2013, 2014; Raniolo 2006). As an institutional political formation, the M5S inherits characteristics of Berlusconi's FI, the LN and the Italy of Values (IDV – *Italia Dei Valori*) party that was created by the 'mani pulite' magistrate Antonio Di Pietro. Scanzi (2012:28; 238-9) argues that Beppe Grillo and Berlusconi share charisma and communicative capacities. Nicola Cucchi (Cucchi, Gianolla, Albertini, et al. 2015) explains that they are both very able at monologues, which is however a detraction from their capacity to dialogue and debate, something that is fundamental in democracy. Berlusconi and Grillo are two great communicators able to win over media attention and their political message was forged by their communication skills (Cosenza 2013; Vaccari 2015) and their communication benefitted from coming from the outside the political elite, as they both were representatives of civil society, one represented the entrepreneurs the other the unemployed. Anselmi sustains that Berlusconi and Grillo are both paternalist leaders, political figures that emerged as outsiders and claimed to act for the future of their beloved sons, thereby sharing a sort of 'paternalism of civil society' (interview Manuel Anselmi). They also share the mediatisation of politics, this time centred on the web rather than television, but with a similar massive approach. Grillo approaches and uses of the web with a utopian aspiration that, to some extents, obsoletes the old media, which, he claims, cause misinformation and perpetrate the rule of the traditional establishment that controls them. Therefore the web, against TV and classic

¹⁸⁷ Sartori retracted a few years later (Sartori 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

newspapers and magazines, is an instrument used by Grillo and Casaleggio to fight against the political elite (Mazza 2012, 2013; Natale and Ballatore 2014; Nizzoli 2013). Besides Italian parties, the M5S has much in common with European enterprises such as the Pirate Party of Germany, the Spanish Podemos and the Greek Syriza parties (Hartleb 2013; Rodríguez-Aguilera 2015).

The expertise of Gianroberto Casaleggio (expert of internet marketing), and his associates, coupled with the fame of Grillo was able to occupy a political space on the web which was empty at this time.¹⁸⁸ Casaleggio himself recognised this (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014), and attracted the increasingly disaffected (mostly young) public of the internet to a political framework which was new media. In the meantime, Grillo and Casaleggio were able to readapt the internet format to a mass public and created an information pole outside the traditional mainstream TV tool. As Biorcio and Natale (2013:99) highlight, a difference between the FI and the M5S is the electoral results because Berlusconi promptly became prime minister while the M5S (and the Beppe Grillo's civic list before it) became increasingly significant over time to eventually claim an electoral victory. The reason for this difference denotes also a substantive political distance between the projects of the FI and the M5S. Berlusconi entered into politics two months before the national elections with the clear objective to gain political power at the centre. Grillo explicitly denied that he wanted to become a candidate and gathered around himself a network of activists who were rooted and working at the local level where he believes political action is more significant. Over time, as we will see below, the project grew and the M5S participated in the national elections and it made history by obtaining the biggest success of a party in a national debut (25.5% of the vote share) without a political candidate for prime minister. The debut of the M5S at the national level, besides occurring with different latencies since the creation of the political project, constitute a confirmation of a tendency in Italy to prise non-institutional candidates (Miconi 2014:9).

¹⁸⁸ Grillo's blog promptly become the most visited blog in Italy and among the most visited blogs in the world and Grillo's social media profiles have on average more followers than other Italian public figures (Bartlett et al. 2013) .

Grillo has a political sympathy for the political discourse of Umberto Bossi (founder of the LN) and for some of the topics that he has brought to the fore (Scanzi 2012:29; 235-237; Turner 2013a:194–96). Most importantly, the LN and the M5S share the identification of local dissatisfaction towards the central political establishment and framework, although the LN identifies with the rich North while the M5S with the entire country. However the objective of secession (LN) and participation (M5S) are evidently different (Diamanti 2013).

Biorcio and Natale (2013:99–102) underline that both movements had little media attention in the initial phase and that both have taken a long path to reach electoral success (see also Natale 2013:20–21). Both operationalise discontent towards the establishment through the polarisation (us vs. them, honest vs. corrupt, good vs. bad) and the simplification of the political rhetoric. They share political views concerning the exit from the Euro, abolition of Equitalia, immigration (partially), strong opposition to Renzi's Government (Sacchi 2015). With the LN and with the IDV the M5S shares a focus on anti-corruption and honesty as broad political categories to defend beyond ideology and scope. The IDV was a sort of political partner as at the time Casaleggio provided web services to the party of Di Pietro and at the European elections of 2009 Grillo and his blog supported the candidature of Sonia Alfano and Luigi De Magistris, both candidates of the IDV. The core political theme of honesty and legality characterise both the IDV and the M5S and gives continuity among the two.

With these three parties (the FI, the LN and the IDV), the M5S shares the centrality of the leader, be it Berlusconi, Umberto Bossi or Di Pietro, as all these parties were founded and led by a charismatic person. Grillo represents the charisma of an art-activist that endured harsh struggles with the establishment when he was a TV comedian. He paid for this with his expulsion from public television, helping fuel his stubborn opposition to corruption. He channelled the enthusiasm of his fans and supporters into the political sphere when he created his blog and later through the M5S. He is the charismatic leader that founded and gave life to the movement, but differs from the other charismatic leaders mentioned above and Matteo Renzi (PD), as he does not directly participate in the political arena and remains outside of any institutional position. Therefore, the electoral victory of the M5S cannot be merely ascribed to a charismatic leadership of the kind of possessed by all other parties, where voters are moved by the personal prestige of the leader-candidate. Voters of the M5S did not

know who would lead the government if the M5S would win the 2013 elections, nor did the wider public know their candidates and therefore their vote was not directly a matter of trust in a specific person but rather was the alternative to such a kind of vote. Finally, the M5S has a core element that none of the other parties had explored and operationalised before, which is that it targets local and national level participation as an essential characteristic of its form of working. Not without contradictions, this is among the central innovations of the movement.

The analysis of the movement certifies that the political orientation of the M5S activists and supporters were primarily left of centre, at least until the electoral affirmation occurred in 2012. The increase of electoral support also included a component of the right wing and in 2015 the electorate of the M5S stabilised in three almost equivalent parts: slightly more than a third are voters that had previously voted for the left or identify with it, a third declares sympathy for the centre and right and a third would not express a preference (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; interview Fabio Bordignon; Colloca and Corbetta 2014; Colloca and Marangoni 2013; Pedrazzani and Pinto 2013). In other words, Grillo was able to gather electoral support from a range of political positions, as he ‘has tapped into major concerns about the way politics is being conducted in Italy. By standing on an anti-establishment platform, and using modern communications, he has combined medium and message to create a genuinely novel type of movement’ (Bartlett et al. 2013:18).

4.2.2 *The root of the M5S*

The increasing dissatisfaction towards political elites is certainly one of the main reasons of the political crisis that has had a great impact in southern European countries. The reasons for this crisis are partially related to the general development of liberal democratic regimes in response to the challenges produced by neoliberal globalisation. However, the domestic context remains predominant in characterising the ideas and the political forms generated by the political crisis. This is especially valid for Italy that finds a paramount response in the emergence of the M5S. It promotes an alternative discourse of democracy with a strong focus on ways to reconceptualise and re-experience democratic representation with forms of political participation that are able to engage a broader range of individuals in decision making, rather than it being restricted to the political establishment. Its political

experience has given rise to a certain criticism in relation to the political form, the structure and the *modus operandi*. All of this is somehow in line with the intention of the founder, which since inception has maintained that ‘parties are dead. I don’t want to create a “party”, an apparatus, a structure of intermediation, but I want to give life to a Movement with a programme. Let anyone who supports the programme present themselves to the voters and ask for the vote’ (Grillo 2009b).

The career of Beppe Grillo (Caracci 2013; Greblo 2011; Santoro 2012, 2014; Scanzi 2012) has functioned as the aggregative force within the M5S’ contesting and contested history. Gianroberto Casaleggio, the co-founder of the movement, was an expert of internet communication and marketing and decided to state publicly his relations with the M5S only in 2012 (Casaleggio 2012), after seven years of shadowed collaboration with Grillo and three years since the official foundation of the M5S. Although Beppe Grillo is recognised as the political head and ‘guarantor’, both of them managed the movement together.¹⁸⁹

Grillo began as a comedian in the late 1970s and worked for the Italian national TV broadcaster (RAI) where he touched upon social and political issues, such as the dangers and risks of nuclear power-plants, political corruption and the manipulation of information by the mass media (Caracci 2013:48–49). RAI fired him for satirising the corruption within the political elite and targeting the PSI (Italian Socialist Party), which headed the government in 1986 (Caracci 2013:54–57). His work continued in theatres and sport halls with a focus on ecology, information and social justice.¹⁹⁰ Grillo performed what Rosanvallon calls the ‘surveillance of power by society’ (Rosanvallon 2008:32) which is an attempt to balance the political stagnation created by the latency between elections. My interviews with critical activists and representatives, including those expelled from the M5S, they all confirm that this spirit remained in the movement until the electoral success of 2013. Grillo’s career translated

¹⁸⁹ Since Casaleggio’s death in April 2016, his son Davide has assumed more preponderance in the M5S, increasing the impact that he had before his father’s death.

¹⁹⁰ Grillo’s past campaigns have included collecting signatures for several referenda (i.e., against electromagnetic pollution and initiatives to increase citizen participation in political decision-making), support for consumer and family savings rights (the Telecom Italia and Parmalat cases), anti-incineration and pro-waste recycling campaigns, support for initiatives against big infrastructures (NoTAV, No Dal Molin), support for internet diffusion (Broadband and WiMax) and the well-known ‘Parlamento Pulito’ (Clean Parliament), which aimed to ban ex-offenders from holding seats in Parliament (Biorcio and Natale 2013:20–21; Mello 2013:181–82).

into a social and political enterprise, and a *de facto* political movement. This phase of his career started with the launch of the blog www.beppegrillo.it in January 2005, created by Casaleggio as a platform of information on Grillo's struggles.¹⁹¹

The informal structure of the M5S began to take form six months after the creation of the blog with the adoption of meetup.com,¹⁹² a social network that facilitated the spontaneous creation of local groups by followers of Grillo's blog. Local groups mushroomed all-over Italy and less than three years later Grillo invited them to contest local elections as 'certified' civic lists (he would grant such certification) in compliance with the themes and values set up in his blog (Grillo 2008). The certification as 'Friends of Beppe Grillo' civic lists implied that the list was 'trustable' and that no previous offenders were candidates (Monina 2013:80–82).

Before and after the creation of the civic lists, in order to crystallise the movement and to evaluate its consistency, Grillo and Casaleggio organised important national public events of protest against the representative crisis. The first two 'V-Days' (fuck you day or 'vaffanculo day') of 2007 and 2008 gathered hundreds of thousands of people in Italian squares (Mello 2013:187–88; Monina 2013:57–58). Although these events were not as spontaneous as the public gatherings that would take place three years later during the Arab Spring and the Indignados and Occupy waves,¹⁹³ they equally represent a moment of rupture in the political sphere and a change that would affect the political equilibrium of the party system in place.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ It won the best site prize in the news and information category, awarded by the Italian newspaper 'Il Sole 24 Ore' (Biorcio and Natale 2013:21) and received other international mentions. The blog emerged in a political void identified and occupied by Casaleggio through the public image of Grillo, because at the time, 'there were few professional bloggers' and 'the blog-sphere was empty of important people able to produce communication in Internet' (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 Video #1 minute 33-36) and influence the public opinion.

¹⁹² Howard Dean used meetup.com in 2003 during the primaries of the American democratic party (Monina 2013:32). In December 2005, Grillo met the coordinators of 120 Meetups for the first time with the aim of establishing a common political path. Other meetings took place in the following months (Biorcio and Natale 2013:85).

¹⁹³ They were organised by Grillo and Casaleggio with the assistance of activists and the professional contribution of Casaleggio's company (Casaleggio Associati).

¹⁹⁴ Public events are organised annually, such as *Italia 5 Stelle* (5 Star Italy), located in Rome (2014), Imola (2015) and Palermo (2016), however participation has reduced to two hundred thousand people over the two days.

Initially, Grillo did not intend to create a political movement to become part of the political system. He wanted to be able to work from the outside and put pressure on the system (and on political parties in particular), to regenerate the left (Travaglio 2012:IX and XIX-XX). However, this attempt from the outside was not successful and political parties were unreceptive of Grillo's demands, something which led to mistrust. For this reason, Grillo and the M5S are not open to forming any coalitions with traditional political parties, aiming instead to change the party system from the inside.

On the 4th of October 2009 – Saint Francis of Assisi Day – Grillo, Casaleggio and their followers founded the M5S in Milan. The choice of the date symbolises the discursive poverty of the movement and its ecological orientation in respect for nature and the environment (Fo, Casaleggio, and Grillo 2013:136 and 188). On the same day the 'non-statute' (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009a), drafted by Grillo and Casaleggio, was approved. The document contains a few basic elements that characterise the M5S as a free association of citizens that 'is not a political party nor should it become so in the future. It wants to be testimony to the possibility of creating an efficient and effective exchange of opinions and democratic debate' (Article 4).

Since the beginning, electoral results have proved encouraging. In 2008 the civic lists did not receive many votes (on average 2%-4%), but they demonstrated a concrete presence all over Italy, with a prevalence in the North, (Colloca and Marangoni 2013:71–74; Vignati 2013:50–52) and continued to grow. In 2011, the M5S obtained their first significant results in different Italian regions, averaging 9%-10% of the vote (Colloca and Marangoni 2013:74–76; Vignati 2013:56–57). The final consolidation took place in the spring 2012 with the election of Federico Pizzarotti as mayor of Parma, the first medium-sized city under the M5S administration. May 2012 proved the turning point, when the M5S achieved a significant 17% in the statistics of popular support at the national level (Mello 2013:256–57). The electoral victory in Sicily, in the autumn of the same year, confirmed the trend that the M5S was becoming the leading party in the region, having won around 15% of the vote (18% for Giancarlo Cancelleri, the candidate for Governor).

The results of the national elections in February 2013 exceeded the forecasts with the M5S receiving a 25,5% of vote share of the thereby becoming the most voted single party with an even and consolidated presence in all the Italian regions. The local elections that

followed in the spring of 2013 yielded unsatisfactory results in comparison to the national election results but they confirmed the tendency towards growth. In Rome, for instance, the M5S candidate, Marcello De Vito, won around 12,5% of the vote (same gains for the M5S). This was a fivefold increase on the 2,5% obtained by Serenetta Monti who campaigned for the Friends of Beppe Grillo Civic List in 2008. The same trend continued in 2014 with a 21% share of the vote in the European elections, and again in 2015 and 2016 when the M5S consolidated its credibility and political potential at all administrative levels getting the mayors of two big cities elected, that being Rome and Turin. The representatives elected by the M5S have generally little or marginal previous party experience and they operate under an austere reduction of political spending such as a reduction of their monthly salary and an elimination of the political pension (Biorcio and Natale 2013; Greblo 2011; Grillo 2012; Monina 2013).

To contrast the creation of internal oligarchies and to foster the participatory potential of local groups and local activism, the M5S's discourse rejects the party structure and has minimal formal bodies and reference people. The network activism that characterises the discourse of the M5S aims at implementing direct democracy through online instruments of deliberation and decision-making. The movement has developed a set of online applications defined the 'M5S operating system' or 'Rousseau'¹⁹⁵ to provide ad-hoc instruments of electronic democracy. Although this system is an unprecedented structure for impact and scale in Italian politics and beyond, the M5S's e-democracy also does strengthen the populist criticism towards the leadership. Critics highlight the manipulative use of the network by Grillo and Casaleggio (Dal Lago 2013; De Rosa 2013; Mello 2013) while the supporters underline the actual political potential of the innovative use of the internet to mobilise, organise and operationalise political participation (more in the empirical chapter on the M5S).

4.2.3 *Innovating political communication*

Manuel Castells affirms that 'democracy, as we knew it, has collapsed within the mind of people' (Castells and Iglesias 2015 min 39:10). Castells continues to affirm that people do not participate in democratic life because they lost trust in the establishment. Therefore, the

¹⁹⁵ In the text 'Rousseau' and 'M5S operating system' are used interchangeably. The Platform Rousseau was inaugurated in April 2016 at the internet address: <https://rousseau.movimento5stelle.it/>.

political process today must be constructed differently, building networks of people between politics and society. Experimentation is taking place in how these networks are built up and maintained. Castells therefore sustains that ‘the current process of political change, does not consist in occupy institutions. It consists in recreating and re-found institutions. [...] a new institutionalism open to society’ (Castells and Iglesias 2015 min 41:13). Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the Podemos party in Spain, responded to this claim by saying that the work of building up political power from participation at the base, is not immediate and is rather demanding in terms of gathering people engagement. In order to speed up the process Podemos thought that a ‘blitz in the media’ would work and indeed this is what they tried, one such attempt with the *Tuerka*.¹⁹⁶ The indignados contributed with new ingredients to generate a general common sense of disaffection from the old politics, and they provided a new platform to operationalise it at the political level:

Since the beginning we understood Tuerka as a space that allow reflecting and intervening. [...] We assumed ourselves as a political party [...]. It is much more a political party a medium of communication than a traditional political party. [...] People do not militate in parties, militate in communication media [...] and communication networks (Castells and Iglesias 2015 min 42:41).

Beppe Grillo’s blog is a paradigmatic case of this kind of new political party explained by Iglesias. Grillo created a space of reflection, intervention and participation (although having limits) where a community of people that felt disenchanted with the political establishment and with the functioning of the political system found a new political dimension. On the one hand, Grillo had always been a political person while performing with his art-activism, on the other hand, the joint project with Casaleggio brought his political potential into a container that was still empty – the web, as it was the first and it still remains the most effective blog. Fabio Bordignon (interview) acknowledges the similarity the M5S has with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia party with respect to the fact that both projects have communication agencies as a constitutive part, Publitalia and Mediaset for Berlusconi and Casaleggio Associati for Grillo (see also Dal Lago 2013). Bordignon’s assumption fails to underline that while Berlusconi had a commercial objective and converted abruptly to politics without a sort of political

¹⁹⁶ Tuerka is a TV show that includes a number entertainment programmes on political and social issues. The idea was created and directed by Podemos’ leadership and is broadcasted in streaming over the internet by Publico TV and other social network channels.

continuum, Grillo was already active in political activism and the blog came to amplify his political action. Bordignon also highlights the similarities between the M5S and Podemos at the level of media diffusion. For example, the use of local television by Podemos and the adoption of the media-space as a channel to give political force (meaning at the level of strengthening a political movement in the electoral context) to social protest. The M5S demonstrate that a strong media leadership is the key to win this space (interview Fabio Bordignon). Grillo's communication style matches perfectly, as in his shows he masters the art of monologue and occupies the space perfectly.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Caracci (2013:201–3) underlines how Grillo's inability and unwillingness to dialogue is unusual and inappropriate for a political leader (see also the conclusions in Dal Lago 2013).

Part Three: Decentralised and contested democracy – empirical
emergences from India and Italy

5 Honesty and self-rule: re-centring democracy on the (party of the) common person

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the democratic potential of the *Aam Aadmi Party* (AAP, Party of the Common Person). It is a critical analysis of how the AAP constructs its political discourse to legitimise its political and ideological position with the electorate and within social and political spheres. This analysis investigates the discourse on the creation of the AAP within the social and political constraints in which it emerged.

In this chapter, neither the origins of the AAP nor the socio-political circumstances that favoured the emergence of the AAP are visited. This decision was taken on the assumption that the introducing analyses have been substantially approached in the contextualisation part. Nonetheless, the socio-political context in which the AAP emerged is the background against which this analysis is built. Assessed here, under this assumption, are the contradictions that the party-movement has incurred along with an identification of the discursive narrative explaining them. It is important to highlight that the following analysis is mainly, but not exclusively, a reflection of the findings of the fieldwork carried out in India from January to April 2014. Whenever the analysis touches upon events outside the fieldwork timeframe, press writings are used as a source of data to document the events.

To clarify the underlying questions of the analysis I believe that it is beneficial to start from the landslide victory of the AAP in the Delhi state election of 2015.¹⁹⁸ It is at this time when the party won 54,3% of the vote and occupied 67 out of 70 seats in the state Assembly.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, the election results showed an increase in the overall voter turnout, which shifted from 57,58% in 2008, to 65,93% in 2013, and on to 67,08% in 2015. This increase of election participation was partially parallel with an increase in consent for the AAP. The popularity of Kejriwal, the AAPs main leader, was an obvious contributor to the victory. In the verdict, there was a clear ‘focus on Kejriwal’s clean image. A happily married, family man. [...] He seems a mix of the modern and the traditional; doesn’t harp on some illusionary dreams

¹⁹⁸ India is a federation of 29 States and 7 union territories, Delhi is ‘National Capital Territory of Delhi’. The difference between a union territory and a state is that the former are governed by the central government through the Lieutenant Governor, Delhi has its own government which has limited power with respect to other states. As a matter of simplicity, I adopt the term Delhi State in the text.

¹⁹⁹ An insight on the political strategy and the AAP organisation behind the victory (Ghose and Vatsa 2015).

but talks of the actual ground realities. Topping it all, he and his team booted and hooted out the politics of hate and communal divides' (Quraishi 2015). This notion is confirmed by the fact that a portrait of Kejriwal was chosen for the cover of the party manifesto and action plan for the Delhi election of 2015, selected over the image of a multitude of AAP workers in agitation on the cover of the 2014 National Manifesto.

The political scene was rapidly changing in 2015 during the campaign, and as such the role of the Chief Ministerial candidate was fundamental, 'some sections of voters voted for the AAP only due to Kejriwal. [...] [S]ome may have shifted their voting preference from other parties to the AAP at the very last minute of voting, keeping in mind the prospective Chief Minister' (Biju 2015). For the first time ever, the Congress Party was unable to get any of its candidates elected (Fernandes 2015) while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) only got three representatives elected. The result of the vote was also the first important defeat of the BJP (which is led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi) since its victory in the national election of May 2014. It was a failure of the BJP to nominate Kiran Bedi as their candidate for the position of Chief Minister against Kejriwal. Bedi was an activist and collaborator of Anna Hazare, together with Kejriwal, in the *India Against Corruption* campaign. The BJP's move to put forward her candidature three weeks before the elections was an implicit recognition of the AAP's potential and innovative political perspective. This perspective offered a fresh image with leading figures (that had emerged from political struggles within civil society), and demonstrated their aspiration to change the corrupted face of mainstream politics. However, Bedi did not even win her own seat (one that the BJP had previously won five times in a row).

What is of greater importance is the fact that the AAP was able to cut across the whole of Delhi society, attracting the great majority of the votes from religious minorities, *Dalits* (the AAP won all 12 reserved seats), and the poor and lower classes. The AAP also received more votes from the upper classes, although its edge here was reduced (Biju 2015; Kumar 2015; Kumar and Gupta 2012; Palshikar and Kumar 2015; S. Visvanathan 2015c). This unprecedented electoral success has increased research interest in the political emergence of the AAP, has confirmed its democratic potential and has provided the AAP with an opportunity to implement it.

This victory provides indications for the analytical work of this study. On the one hand, these results demonstrate an important popular support for the AAP in Delhi, as it is particularly interesting to see that its manifestation has cut across society regardless of religion, caste, class and gender. Meanwhile, On the other hand, the role of Kejriwal's leadership in the victory is a point of controversy due to the fact that centralisation of leadership contrasts with the idea of *swaraj* and self-rule. The interest raised by the AAP in the struggle for the democratisation of democracy is based on counter-hegemonic, bottom-up, self-rule oriented democratic principles. As seen above, the AAP's proposal of *swaraj* – and all its consequential participatory democratic perspectives – may be the most interesting aspects to understand its alternative political potential.

In order to evaluate such potential, this section will now focus on the discursive strengths and weaknesses emerging from this young political formation. This is explored in four main areas, with each one given a chapter section below. The four areas are connected and they cannot be de-contextualised. In order to understand the potential and contradictions of the AAP it is necessary to read its complex political discourse. At the centre of the party-movement's discourse there is the 'common person', who is the core of the party. It is around them that the notions of *swaraj* and decentralisation are developed, for which leadership and participation are constructed looking at a utopian egalitarian future that goes beyond social, religious and economic divisions. The first section that follows tackles the concept of people emerging through the AAP's experience. The second section analyses theory, forms and challenges espoused by the AAP in bringing about political change based on *swaraj* and decentralisation. The third section explores the perspectives offered by the AAP on leadership including participatory experiments. Lastly, the fourth section analyses the party-movement's performance in increasing equality and also in relation to Indian democratic traditions.

5.1 Common person

In the theoretical section, I elaborated on the undefined and recurrently provisional character of the 'people', and its synonyms as political categories. Among the most widely used political synonyms for 'the people' in use in India today is '*Aam Aadmi*', which literally means 'common man' but generally implies the 'common person'. How does the AAP define it? This section focuses on the popular understanding of the term and its social and political

implications. It is characterised by a moral standard that acknowledges the assumption of the representative regime as a compromise and the need to re-establish the relation between civil society and the state. The AAP definition echoes the moral standard and the social-activism biography of the AAP leadership whom figure out a reconnection between the state and civil society. For the AAP, the ‘common person’ is a vague political category that does not alienate rich people, although it excludes ‘corrupted’ individuals. The electoral results demonstrate that this definition was transversally appealing in society but not to those benefitting from neoliberal globalisation for which the AAP discourse is unattractive.

5.1.1 Popular understandings of the ‘people’

The understanding of the ‘people’ was one of the issues debated at the creative workshop organised at the AAP state office of Rajasthan in Jaipur. The definition resulted from extended conversations amongst the participants, who were the AAP’s workers and sympathizers. It starts from the definition provided by Kejriwal²⁰⁰ but goes beyond and reads as follows: ‘A “common Man” is one who suffers from the consent system which is not corruption-free. Also any one, who is honest, fair and stands against corruption, is a common man’ (participants at the creative workshop at the AAP office, 8/2/2014). Although this definition does not escape the vagueness of the concept of ‘people’, it identifies some of the characteristics that classify members of the people, or common persons. In this acceptance ‘common’ is in contradiction with ‘corruption’, as the ‘common’ is not corrupted, but rather is honest.

At the Centre for Gandhian Studies (CGS) at the University of Rajasthan, a workshop was organized and attended by students of the centre who were not necessarily supporters of the AAP. These students characterised the common person by underlying the main relations of this political categorisation with the political electoral contexts (Jain et al. 2014). The common person is a voter whose vote is conditioned by ‘caste, money, powerful leaders, religions, party workers, [...] regional faces and media polls’ (which are affected by parties and lobbies). The idea of ‘participation in decision making’ and the exercise of the ‘right to vote’

²⁰⁰ Kejriwal gave a definition of *Aam Aadmi* in his first speech as Chief Minister of Delhi on 3 January 2014: ‘Anybody who wants a genuine, honest government despite where he lives, whether in a posh colony or a jhuggi, is an aam aadmi. The demands of the aam aadmi are very simple, but the polity of this country has failed to provide even those basic amenities over the last 65 years despite spending crores’ (Anon 2014).

are not enough to be identified as a common person for which, workshop participants highlighted the importance of ‘education, fair media, educated leaders and rejection of corrupted ones’. Workshop participants elaborated on the elements of the strength of the common person, which include ‘youth power, social media and an ancient culture’.

Participants affirmed the AAP alterity to the elite-manipulated state-apparatus and the alignment with social activists, and they provided a listing of initiatives that the government granted to the common people thanks to the work of social activists. These included the ‘Right to Information, Right to Recall, MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), Social Audit, Public service Guarantee Act, *lokpal* bill (in centre [the country level]), *lokayukta* bill (In [the] states), a good Judicial system for India, [and] *panchayat* (my village’s government - an idea of Gandhi)’ (Jain et al. 2014). The poor were not identified with those bagging support but rather with those who are willing to earn their living through employment and want to contribute to the social and natural environment around them.

The relationship of people, state and activists is reconnected to the definition of common people that was provided by the participants of the workshop organised at the AAP office. Firstly, opposition to the rigid division of state and civil society, finds confirmation here. Secondly, the common person is also understood as an oppressed voter seeking emancipation from oppression, both while voting and after the vote in the system of corruption. On the one hand, she has the power of the vote, on the other hand, she is manipulated in exercising her right to vote and after voting she has to become subdued to the corrupt system. Indeed, for this reason the state apparatus is detected as the base for corruption, while honesty, dignity and good politics are identified in social activism. The AAP represents itself as the honest face of politics, emerging from civil society and promising to change the political landscape by starting from an honest leadership and strengthening institutional participation in order to foster the dignity of common people.

The substantive definition of the common person emerging from the rise of the AAP highlights an underlying centrality of dignity and personal ethic (honesty, fairness, and opposition to corruption). This does not exclude subjugation to, and rejection of, the corrupted – or political-colonial system. The people, are also constantly looking for

alternatives to the corrupt, political-colonial system without limiting themselves to utopian perspectives. They struggle for social emancipation through a step by step amendment of the laws (and the form of their implementation) regulating the political-colonial system itself (RTI, MNREGA, *lokpal* Bill, etc.). The profile of the common person identified by this definition comes very close to those pro-active people who participate in social movements and social campaigns, and that are organised by inspired social activist leaders. To this extent, it is no surprise that Kejriwal and the AAP leadership – largely coming from the *India Against Corruption* (IAC) campaign – gained popular support and raised political hope.

5.1.2 The AAP's definition of people

The general definition of common person by the AAP – the one who suffers from the corrupted system – is elaborated on within the Delhi 70 Point Action Plan 2015:²⁰¹

AAP has drawn up a 70-point actionable plan for all sections of Delhi's population – youth, women, traders, businesses, entrepreneurs, rural and urban villages, safai karmacharis [Maintenance and Cleanliness Workers involved in cleaning public spaces, like streets, stations, etc.], minorities, unauthorized and resettlement colonies, JJ clusters [Jhuggi-Jhopdi clusters or slum area clusters], RWAs [Resident Welfare Associations], housing cooperatives and group housing societies (Aam Aadmi Party 2015a:3).

It is evident that the definition of people posed by the AAP cuts across the class, religious and geographical divide, and seeks to appeal (by naming them) to a variety of social categories. Suman (AAP activist, interview) is a high caste and a wealthy doctor; he is of the opinion that each person is a common person when she has to deal with her business alone, and she is an elite when she can count on the subordinate work of others or favouritism due to her own social position. For instance, Suman belongs to the elite in his own place where he has people working for him, or, in the hospital where he is a well-known and respected doctor. However he is a common person in the street, where if halted by the police and punished unrightfully, he has the option to pay the bribe just as anybody else would. Arun (AAP leader, interview) straightforwardly affirms that '[c]ommon people is who believe in honesty, who is against, totally against corruption. Easily available to the common people, and is loyal towards

²⁰¹ The AAP has adopted a participatory approach to draft its manifesto and action plan 2015 in consultation with the people of Delhi in the exercise called 'Delhi Dialogue'. Through a number of thematic meetings the party consulted the people of the State in order to collect information and issues to draft their electoral manifesto and action plan (Aam Aadmi Party 2015d; Ghose 2014a; Mehrotra and Das 2015; Sikdar 2014b; Vishnoi 2014).

his nation. This is the *Aam Aadmi*. Irrespective of money consideration. Money have no consideration in making the people *Aam Aadmi*'. The wealthy doctor finds plain place in the AAP's common person because the wealth he may have is not discretionary over his subjugation to the political-colonial system, thereby he confirms that the category is extremely wide.

While the AAP leadership reaffirms the disconnection between economics and the definition of the people, Amarjeet, an AAP activist and retired *Dalit* bureaucrat, who for decades worked in the Indian banking sector in different cities, defends the opposite opinion. He was an AAP sympathiser and an applicant candidate at the national elections of 2014, but the experience with the party-movement was a delusion for him, and he developed a critical reading of the AAP's definition of the common person. He affirms that:

They [AAP leaders and workers] say that everybody is a common man. [Regarding Dalits], they are not addressing this issue at all. For them they [Dalits] are meaningless, they are useless, they are not welcome. [...] Everyone is a common man for them. Who is suffering of the system, he is a common man. He may be Birla, he may be Tata, he may be anybody. Who is sufferer of the system, he is a common man. He may be blood business man having Mercedes car, if he is not happy with the system he is a common man. This is their definition. [...] Their definition of common people is so vague, so vague, so... it can be interpreted anyway you like. Because they have included 99% of the people as a common people. For them everybody is a common people (interview II, Amarjeet).

In asserting the comprehensiveness of the AAP definition, Amarjeet declares it untenable as he alleges that the missed focus on *Dalit*, or the marginalised, provides for their exclusion from the AAP discourse.²⁰² In other words, the ambiguity given by the broadness of the category is an exclusionary factor. For Amarjeet, rich people are not the common person, as they do not suffer corruption like the lower castes and classes do. However, the definition of people as a political category needs to be broad and encompassing in order to be as inclusive as possible. Rajeev Bhargava, the director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) at the time of this projects field research stage, emphasized that the definition of the common person 'has to be vague and ambivalent. [...] It has to be a thin definition so that it includes everybody [...]. You can't be popular and not include everybody' (interview Rajeev Bhargava). This is the social weakness of the concept of the common person,

²⁰² P L. Mimroth, chairperson of the Centre for Dalit Rights (Jaipur) and Satish Kumar, director of the same centre, maintain that the AAP does not structurally tackle the *Dalit* issue, bur refer to castes concerns only casually (interview P. L. Mimroth and Satish Kumar).

that is, it remains generalist and allows one to manipulate its use to achieve objectives which may be contrary to those of the marginalised and oppressed. These definitions may lead to new social frictions if they do not make a separate effort to include the marginalised, discriminated and excluded.

5.1.3 Defining the people focusing on the excluded

The AAP definition of the common person is centred on a declared opposition to corruption and fails to focus on those who suffer the most from social exclusion; for instance, women and the *Dalit*.²⁰³ Despite this, however, the electoral results of the 2015 Delhi election showed that the poor and the *Dalit* communities largely supported the AAP. This fact may be read as to suggest a negation of Amarjeet's statements, meaning that the *Dalit* believe that the AAP raises innovative democratic perspectives for them. In a sense, the AAP support in the Delhi elections marked a cross-societal victory that echoed the definition of the people as promoted by the party-movement. Nonetheless, the question of inclusion and exclusion is extremely relevant and the AAP's concept of the common person fails to focus on the victims of capitalist oppression, patriarchal or religious discrimination in order to attract the middle class and thus gain cross-community support. In the pages that follow, the way that the AAP plays a trade-off between participation and representation, and political ideals and policy, will be discussed.

The AAP had made a converting choice: it left the category open but excluded those in connivance with the political-colonial system, or the system of corruption. In order to understand what the AAP choice implies it helps to refer to the empirical work of those who bridge the public sphere with the sphere of the excluded, and the marginalised. Kavita Srivastava, a renowned social activist in Rajasthan and around India, underlines how the process of globalisation is influencing the work of social activists and alienating a part of the population from the 'common' ground of the people:

[T]he process set forth by twenty years of globalisation, has completely created a political elite and a middle class which is absolutely insensitive, blind... actually it has blindfolded itself, shut its ears. It doesn't want to see it doesn't want to listen to actually what the rest of India is living like. So that's a political leadership as well as the class that gained from 20 years of globalisation. From the global finance capital, the class that gained... So in a

²⁰³ We shall come back to this point more times including in the chapter section 'Equality and Traditions'.

scenario where we have a completely desensitised, indifferent 25 to 28% of the population, not wanting to see the other side, the challenges of activism become very, very, very tough (interview Kavita Srivastava).

Srivastava highlights that the common people are not merely all those who are living in alienation with the corrupt and ‘unbridled’ state centred in the oppressive political system. If the aspect of active citizenship is core to the common people and means that one must act with dignity and be proactive politically, then this term cannot include the ‘indifferent 25 to 28%’, which does not want to listen to the negative consequences of twenty years of globalisation. The (common) people group does not include those who benefit of neoliberal globalisation at the cost of the negative consequences that this process causes upon all the people in society. They are not common people, but rather are those who benefit of the system and close their eyes when confronted with the exclusion produced by the system. Therefore, due to their deliberate lack of participation and interest for social problems, they are not considered part of the common people. This restricted and marginalised but majority concept of the ‘common’ people, is the reference that is being used in this analysis. A ‘common person’ is a person who is subdued by the corrupted political system, suffers from its exclusionary forms, and is open and engaged to changing it.

5.2 *Swaraj* and decentralisation

The principal innovation brought by the political discourse of the AAP is *swaraj*, an understanding of democracy that overcomes the limits of representation through empowering local (neighbourhood and village) political units. With the emphasis on the urban dimension, the AAP contextualises Gandhi’s proposal and attempts to reconcile contemporary society with Mahatma’s decentralised project. The AAPs option to focus on urban units is related to the fact that the AAP originated in Delhi, and is also due to the complexity of rural India where political parties are settled with a longstanding tradition and innovation is more articulated. The AAP’s penetration into rural India is extremely limited, especially if compared to its presence in the highly urban state of Delhi.

Additionally, the role of the media in rural India is marginal compared to that of urban India. Although the AAP has benefitted from media support, the party’s relationship with the media is controversial. The AAP became of interest to the media because it occupied a political space that was vacant in Delhi, the space of the dissatisfied within the political-colonial

system, while it also represented the formalisation of social and political dissatisfaction in a politically empowering project. Thanks to the mature level of experience possessed by the AAP's leadership and volunteers (developed in social activist campaigns before the emergence of the AAP), Kejriwal and his fellows could work out a political translation of the social struggle and put it into political terms and legislation. In this way the AAP questioned the division of state and civil society in line with the main theoretical assumptions of their work. The passage from social to political implementation has not yet been accomplished and remains to be studied, especially concerning the definition of the economic dimension of *swaraj*.

5.2.1 Devolution

The AAP's declared political objective is to eradicate corruption and devolve political power to the common people. Its founding documents are written around this objective, including its constitution (Aam Aadmi Party 2015b), in which article II 'Objective of the Party' states: 'Democracy is popular self-rule, but the current practice of democracy negates this ideal and reduces the citizen to a mere subject. The AAP aims to restore power to the people, so as to realise the promise of Swaraj enshrined in our Constitution.' *Swaraj* emerged as the political theory of the party as it was based on Kejriwal's book entitled *Swaraj* (2012). The book was inspired by the seminal work of Gandhi *Hind Swaraj* (1938), although only Anna Hazare mentions the Mahatma in the foreword of the book. This is not a paradox due to the fact that the book avoids entering into the dispute between Gandhi and Ambedkar on caste and untouchability in order to minimise the alienation of *Dalits*. The objective of the book was to be able to reach a transversal consensus on what is *swaraj*, and, this is also why Kejriwal renounced royalties on the book in order to increase its dissemination.

The AAP's vision document (Aam Aadmi Party 2012), electoral manifestos and action plans (Aam Aadmi Party 2013b, 2014b, 2015c, 2015a)²⁰⁴ have constituted the development of the theorisation of *swaraj*. This has been enriched by increasing participation by intellectuals and activists in the party, interactions and consultations with the people, and by the electoral progression of the AAP. The result is that ideas about *swaraj* are more and more refined and

²⁰⁴ For a critique of the vision document see *Distortions and Blind Spots in the Vision Document of AAP* (Shukla 2013).

detailed from the original broader concepts.²⁰⁵ The sociologist and party leader²⁰⁶ Anand Kumar maintains that through *swaraj* the AAP is developing a citizen-centric political approach and that the:

[AAP] is showing courage in working for a paradigmatic shift from representative democracy to a participatory democracy with shades of M K Gandhi, M N Roy, Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) combined with the constitutional reforms introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi regime through the 73rd and 74th amendments on decentralisation (Kumar 2013:13).

The symbolic importance of Kejriwal's book '*Swaraj*' is that it has given a second life to Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, advocating for a participatory political potential in opposition to the limits of representative democracy. The understanding of *swaraj* provided by Kejriwal follows the stream of thoughts of Gandhi's original, '[i]f there is *swaraj*, there will be development for the people automatically. *Swaraj* means self-rule: our rule. We will be able to take decisions concerning our village, our town and our community' (Kejriwal 2012:XXI). The general and simplistic character of the idea of *swaraj*, as expressed by Kejriwal, includes the opposite to the political-colonial system and implies forms of social, economic, cultural and political independence for wider society. Kejriwal affirms: '[d]uring the British rule, India was governed from London. After 1947, India is being governed from Delhi and other state capitals. Our fight for independence was not only for liberation from the British. It was also for *Swaraj*; for self-rule' (2012:XX).

Swaraj is the broad 'empty signifier' of the AAP, as it is largely advocated by the AAP's supporters at the base, and it is the theoretical framework for the AAP's political practice. In 2013, as soon as the AAP 28 MLAs had been elected, they, together with all other party candidates, were trained to grasp the notion of *swaraj* and of participatory democracy (Vatsa 2013). The candidates of the 2014 national election were asked about their opinion on

²⁰⁵ Kejriwal's *Swaraj* was criticised for referring to imaginary Indian democratic past and to advocating an extreme simplification of the political system in order to devolve power to the people. People's power would then imply forms of social despotism, and would demand too much time for democratic participatory exercises (Gupta 2014). While these critiques identify the structural weaknesses of the theory of *swaraj* as proposed in Kejriwal's book, they tend to underestimate the democratic potential that they want to express. The work carried on by the AAP through empirical development and with theoretical refinements is the expression of the potential already present in Kejriwal's *Swaraj* which Ernesto Laclau (2005a) defines populist claims.

²⁰⁶ Anand Kumar was party leader until April 2015 when he was expelled from the party together with Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhushan and Ajit Jha.

Kejriwal's 'Swaraj' book, and, within the candidacy application form they also had to state their agreement with the idea of *swaraj*.

5.2.2 Urban innovation

By taking back the idea of *swaraj*, the AAP has reinvigorated the concept by giving it a new life and have removed the dust that had accumulated upon it since the time of Gandhi. While maintaining the original core value of the concept, it has taken on new forms to be implemented into metropolitan society. During Gandhi's time, this had proven to be an insurmountable obstacle to overcome, and was also setback due to the early assassination of the Mahatma. Today, the bifurcation of the concept of *swaraj* and modern lifestyle is even wider. Nikhil Dey, a social activist working on grassroots democracy and people participation, underlines the complexity of such a combination in India where discrimination at many different levels, starting from gender and on to caste, makes it very complicated to implement horizontal democratic practices. He asks:

How do you deal with pluralism in a country like India, which is so rich in different kinds of communities even who live at the margin, who live differently, who think differently. And, in mainstream that is so quick to dismiss laws, even ways of living and system of thoughts have been wrong, ethically wrong, morally wrong. So, I think those are very interesting challenges, that's why, I mean, we are nowhere near any version of swaraj, and certainly something that we call "panchayati raj system", has... is just a very, very crude version of participatory democracy. And, in fact it is more and more becoming a pervertive [sic] version of it. It is very convenient again for elites to just make this a system of implementation of their own ideas, where they may find it difficult to implement it themselves, by again picking on, building on an elite structure that they can ally with. And that elite, who are the surpanches, can take care of the rest. Because of power in their hands. So, there are all those critics of all conventional existing systems. But, even in things like we do – public audits, social audits – how do you make sure who controls that audit, who decides who will speak, who decides decisions taken. How do you make sure everyone gets a voice? How do you make sure women can participate? How do you make sure... Participation is very... it's a lot of hard work, so especially in this world that, more and more, want people to think of only themselves. How much will they really... You can't force participation, you can't do it on a gun or you can't do it... [... on a] one day [event of participatory democracy]²⁰⁷ under the sun, how many days will you spend? So, how often? Every year? Every month? Every six months? All the time? How many times? Maybe you will go four times and you get fed-up. And then, does the whole system collapse? Or then do only those who know they want something out of it, use it, and take advantage of it? So, there are many such things that need... that have not been worked out. Swaraj has never ever been worked out. For all is...

²⁰⁷ Nikhil Dey refers to the participatory event organised by MKSS in Jaipur on April 7th 2014 that was attended by around 6000 poor rural people. The meeting's objective was to question political parties campaigning for national elections to understand their plans to address the grievances of poor rural people. The event was an effective bottom-up exercise because the people invited and questioned the politicians, not vice versa.

ill representative democracy is for us to see, swaraj we have never seen. And we certainly can't go on swaraj on the basis of three and a half villages spread over two hundred thousand villages. So you'll have Hiware Bazar, you'll have a Ralegan Siddhi... That to me is telling (interview Nikhil Dey).

Dey underlines two very important considerations. The first is that participation is not institutionalised in India and even the *panchayati raj* system of governance has failed and was converted into a system of further centralisation of power. The elite have manipulated the *panchayati raj* with the logic of representation and therefore the system has increasingly assumed a dimension of control of the centre over the periphery, rather than of independence of the periphery from the centre (more on this below). Secondly, Dey underlines the difficulties in entrusting a local community with a very horizontal participatory approach that can ensure high quality participation and that can stimulate it, something which is a delicate task. Dey's interview highlights the fact that participation needs to be worked on at the grassroots level, as opposed to being based upon central institutional resolutions. Local experiences to date, however, are still very limited. These many challenges undermine a romantic conception of participation and devolution, and are amplified in urban areas where the local community of a neighbourhood is far more dispersed than that of a rural village.

Despite the challenges, decentralisation and participation are permanent perspectives for Gandhian scholars and activists. These research participants are aware that it will take a long time to be implemented in a form that is consistent with the original ideas (interviews Anupam Mishra and Amit Kumar). The AAP's attempt, at least in its initial phase, has been read as an advance in this direction by the Gandhians. To date, however, the AAP's initiatives have been too recent to be fully commented upon and the majority have coupled great expectations with caution when reading the AAP's performance.

The AAP reworked the concept of *swaraj* starting from the popularity of the IAC campaign and then combined Gandhi's idea to a different relationship with development and modernity. The AAP have advanced the concept, as they started from city life, as it is there where Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia (his close colleague and vice-chief minister of Delhi) and their *Parivartan* matured and gained adequate experience. Thus, the AAP continues to try to combine what for many critics was unconceivable during the time of Gandhi, a contemporary society with a concept of decentralised democracy rooted in the Indian democratic

tradition.²⁰⁸ Combining the concept of *swaraj* to the city is not a task that can be done immediately. This is because the social life in cities is substantially different from the one in smaller centres. The community that characterises village life, and around which Gandhi based his idea of *swaraj*, is absent in alienating big and over-populated metropolises. Awadh Prasad (interview), Gandhian social activist, explains that democracy in the Indian tradition is based on family roots which additionally serve as the foundation of the community. The secretary of the Gandhi Memorial Trust in Delhi, Ram Chandra Rahi (interview), goes on further to explain that ‘city life is parasitical life’, as it alienates the relational dimension of life and disaggregates people. The lack of opportunities and conditions for dialogue and mutual commitment in debating and solving problems is a shortcoming for urban democracy.

In principle, the AAP’s proposal of *swaraj* in the city, based on the *mohalla sabha* (neighbourhood council), is an innovative element designed to bring about the urban ‘face to face’ dimension that is fundamental for democratic debates. Modern city life brings in a completely different logic compared to the one underlying Gandhi’s idea of *swaraj*. Rajeev Bhargava (interview) highlights that there are two opposite forces at play: on the one hand, the tendency of contemporary society to privilege the private dimension with individual withdrawal from public affairs, and, on the other hand, the public tendency towards the common good. Modern day society sees the strength of the first of these two tendencies, therefore participatory democracy and *swaraj* raise scepticism. The AAP’s vision is questioned by this background scepticism, but it too is also questioning such scepticism as a political assumption.

5.2.3 The media impact

The media plays a controversial role with respect to democratic participation and decentralisation and does so with different intensities in rural and urban areas. Varun (AAP leader, interview) highlights that the media can play a fundamental subversive and

²⁰⁸ Anna Hazare endures Gandhi’s orthodox rural vision affirming that: ‘it will definitely make a difference if villages are developed and become self-sufficient. One day it will arrive, it may take one hundred years, two, three, four, five hundred years, but one day it is going to come that all the people living in the city will have to return to the villages. Because after five hundred years there will be shortages of everything because you have exploited all the national resources by that time. The dams which supply water to the city, will be full with the silt all over. No drinking water in the cities, what will they do? No other goal than to turn to the villages’ (interview Anna Hazare).

emancipatory role in democratic struggles. For example, this is the use made by Gandhi via his journals and newsletters. However, the media (especially the big media corporations), may be manipulative and interest-led in advocating certain notions of democratic evidence and life-style with a stronger communication impact in the cities compared to the countryside. Ramesh Prashad Sharma (interview), a social activist and community leader in the Hingotiya village in the Jaipur rural area, stated that only 10-20% of the community has access to the media. In Sharma's opinion, this low rate crystallises mainstream political knowledge and slows down political change. As a result, it is challenging for the AAP to compete against the two major national parties (Congress and BJP) in rural areas. It is worth noting that such a low rate of media impact can also act as a filter of external influence into community life and democratic forms. In cities, this filter is much thinner, if it exists at all. Therefore, on the one hand, community life dispersion is intensified by the media impact at the city level, while, on the other hand, political change is more likely to happen there if compared to the countryside.

Research participants that took part in the fieldwork phase of this study are generally of the opinion that the media had an impact on the AAP's political performance. Despite this, however, there is no consensus concerning the advantage for the AAP of such an impact. Sunny Sebastian (interview), is a media expert who maintains that the relationship between the media and the AAP was beneficial for both, as the AAP gained in visibility while the media had appealing topics to publish. Sebastian affirms that this is due to a double movement: on the one hand, the AAP welcomed a number of professionals from the media, including top leaders (such as Manish Sisodia, Ashutosh, Shazia Ilmi and Rakhi Birla), and worked out a smart media approach. On the other hand, initially the media were eager to publish everything they could about the AAP, and as often happens when there is a new source of public interest, they did not investigate too deeply into the news they presented.

Amarjeet (interview II) and Aruna Roy (interview) both agree that the media was superficial regarding the AAP. Roy also believes that it was easier for the AAP to gather media attention due to the fact that they are from, and are based in, the Indian Union's capital of

Delhi. This is while social activists working in the countryside often face more difficulties gaining media attention their campaigns.²⁰⁹

Srivastava (interview) contends that the media are not generally interested in social activist struggles for the poor. This is due to the fact that the media is corporately controlled and is very interested in the neoliberal logic of electoral campaigns. This is an issue as presence in the media is paramount for social struggles' success, although access is hard to get.

Some research participants believed that without the media's support the AAP would not have emerged (Amitabh and Karanvir), while others point out the ostracism the media had towards the party during the formation of the first AAP Delhi government.²¹⁰ In January and February of 2014, most television talk-shows and public debates touched upon one or more aspects of the AAP and its policies, something which was a hot topic at the time. For instance, this was the case at the Jaipur Literature Festival that took place from the 17-21 January 2014. National newspapers published articles about the AAP on a daily basis until the government resigned on the 14th of February. It was then that the media started to shift political attention from the AAP to the favourite candidate of the upcoming national elections (May 2014), who was Narendra Modi of the BJP. The AAP almost disappeared from the media by the time I left India in April of 2014. The AAP was the political alternative and was hugely attractive in public debates but after resigning from Delhi's government, it faded out in the media, and the poor electoral results (even in Delhi) are partially a consequence.

²⁰⁹ This position is confirmed by Varun who reasserts the influence of the media in cities with respect to the countryside. The 10-20% rate of media penetration in the countryside mentioned above (interview Ramesh Prashad Sharma), partially explains the limited interest of the media for the countryside. The AAP made an intentional use of the media and a biographical experience may give the example of their techniques because they took advantage of my own presence to claim that foreign researchers were interested in the AAP novelty. In my first visit to the AAP office in Jaipur, I met the AAP leader that I had contacted while preparing the fieldwork, in the months before departing for India. He was a leading activist in the AAP office in Jaipur, he introduced me to the AAP leadership and volunteers present in the office. The AAP leaders silently decided to make use of my presence to increase party's visibility on the media. Without being previously informed, suddenly (the same and following days) I was contacted and interviewed by a number of journalists who published a few articles on my presence at the AAP office in Jaipur (Akhtar 2014c, 2014b, 2014a; Tiwari 2014). These articles are not exempt of imprecision and distortions and omit some relevant information, but, most importantly, this shows the AAP's appeal for Indian media in January 2014.

²¹⁰ Deepika argues that the media overstated the Bharti and Bhaduri cases (more on them below). Deepika argues that the AAP's initial novelty implied a harsher scrutiny for the party by the media: 'We have to give our comments twice a day. This is the only party in India that is giving its comments twice a day, and it has been giving us popularity because we are facing all this'.

5.2.4 The AAP beyond the panchayati raj

Similar to what has happened in several other countries such as those of southern Europe, the AAP is a party-movement occupying an innovative democratic space characteristic of democracy in the XXI century (Santos 2015b). Political-colonialism creates a *vacuum* in which a party-movements fits perfectly as alternative because it is generally characterised by decentralisation, participation and an anti-elitist approach, and it thereby concretise its electoral appeal. James, a high-ranking diplomat of the European Union to India, confirms that the AAP occupies that space in the Indian political landscape:

Kejriwal understood something clearly, which is that Indian democracy has produced very undemocratic mechanisms of decision making and processes of control, of vote banks and which then have repercussions in terms of the lack of accountability and... etc. He understood that and he understands [also that] people are fed up of that. So, he goes to the other extreme and wants to establish these kind of self-governing institutions. They are very local, grassroots based whereby people decide how to use resources. I don't know how the resources appear, but anyway... [...] And people are given the right to decide about their resources. That is interesting because I think there is a sense of total disempowerment that people have. Rahul Gandhi is always talking about disempowerment, [...] and in fact the panchayati raj, promoted very much by his father and that he wants to promote, is also - not only about empowerment - is also about disempowerment. It's about disempowerment of about a deeply corrupt system. And so, Kejriwal understood all of that and understood that there is a constituency for this. There is a deeper desire of people to be able to participate in decision making, as well (interview James).

James properly highlights the intuition possessed by Kejriwal of exploiting the weakness of representation and the political alienation of voters opposed to the uncontrolled rule by the elite. He also highlights the complexity of electoral streams and vote-banks in India where manipulation (i.e. caste, religion, family ties) raise two more issues: one related to power and disempowerment and the other related to the failure of the *panchayati raj*. I will come back to the latter shortly, while for the former I shall highlight an expression that was used by a diplomat. On the one hand, he assesses 'disempowerment' as the result of 'undemocratic mechanisms of decision making', while on the other hand he affirms that with *swaraj* 'people are given the right to decide about their resources'. This analysis highlights the perversion of the power dynamic that is based on the centres of the mechanisms of power as when power has to be 'given' to those who actually hold it, the people. This is the colonial dimension of liberal democracy legitimised by the reduction of decision-making to the vote. This is why, in framing a participatory and decentralised discourse, the AAP is tackling political-colonialism. The aim of *swaraj* is decentralisation in order to leave power where it should be- in the hands

of the people. Rahi (interview) specifies the juncture of the AAP and Gandhi maintaining that 'if we want to decentralise the power, every power, there should be a basic unit – basic unit means face to face society – a group where people know each other, people can dialogue each other [sic], people can manage sitting face to face. That is *mohalla* that is *gram* (village)'. The AAP has understood very clearly that this also is the political path necessary to overcome the vote banks and the trade-off of votes with political gifts. The Delhi electoral results of 2015 are indeed proof that this catch-all discourse was given a chance by the people of Delhi, but the occupation of horizontal political space is just another reason for the AAP's emergence.

The *panchayati raj* is a central topic for any research about political decentralisation in India, as it is a system that has been introduced with constitutional amendments by the central government in order to implement Gandhi's idea of participation. If this system had been effective, the AAP probably would not have emerged. To understand its shortcomings, I explore here a few important interviews that have been collected from research participants engaged at the grassroots level to foster democracy and from Gandhian scholars able to evaluate the system against Gandhi's theory.

Amit Kumar is the project director of the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj (KIGS), a Gandhian organisation engaged in community work in rural Rajasthan. He outlines the difference between the *panchayati raj* as a constitutional provision and its practice, and denounces the undue appropriation that parties have done of this system.

We have left the democratic process for the political parties and they are doing [more] harm than any good. Because they have their own interest in the grassroots level democracy and they try to manage it accordingly. After [the] British left, nothing was done to improve the grassroots level democracy in India. Political parties ha[d] been saying but, truly speaking nothing was done. It remained as it was, nobody took care of it. At the national level, Congress party, tried to do it by making laws, but at the grassroots level nothing practical was done. Like you see, after the 73rd amendment all the power was to the panchayat and "they can do this, they can do this, they can do this..." but it's only on papers. If you go and talk to the people there in the panchayat they don't have anything in their hand. So the power structure remains the same, although, if you talk to them [elite] they give you all the detail, notes, ten page notes, "ok we did this, we did this, we did this." And although this turn to be grassroots level democracy but if you go and practically see the things at the village level, you'll find that think. And originally there was no political system at the grassroots level at the panchayat level. But unofficially all the elections at the panchayats level, they are contested on the political party lines [...] which were not allowed but indirectly it is done. That, ok, this surpanch is of Congress party, this surpanch is of BJP, this surpanch is of this party... although on paper there is nothing written there. There is no party name written there, but unofficially they are into the system. So [a] lot of work has to be done at the grassroots level in order to teach people what true democratic system is, how you can

enjoy the fruits of true democracy. People are not aware what it is so... they are just changing the party here and there and then they are not going deep into the main theme of what a democratic system would look like. Because they haven't experienced it. So whatever the political parties are saying, whatever they understand themselves, they do it (interview Amit Kumar).

Above we saw how Nikhil Dey maintains that the system is an instrument for political elites to control the vastness of the country at the local level. He maintains that 'the *panchayati raj* system 'is just a very, very crude version of participatory democracy. [...] It is very convenient again for elites to just make this a system of implementation of their own ideas' (interview Nikhil Dey). Ramesh Prashad Sharma (interview) is the leader of a Community Based Organisation (CBO), a self-help organisation coordinating twelve villages. The CBO deals with daily issues related to administration and management to support villagers and to facilitate their connection to the government and its rural programmes. Sharma maintains that the relationship between the CBO and the *panchayats* is one of close cooperation. The CBO helps out the *panchayats* for instance with the distribution of the rashing cards (subsidy cards). However, the *panchayats* have problems such as: the people elected are often illiterate, the surpanch is pressured by the people to look after their own individual needs, and they are tied to political parties. Local politics is much divided during election campaigns, while in times of regular operation, the people in charge of the *panchayats* give priority or special privilege to people who belong or sympathise with their party, what is a common, although not generalizable, practice. Sharma confirms that the *panchayats* are not performing their duties as they should, especially for when it comes to their illiterate leaders. Just the fact that the CBO exists is the evidence that the *panchayats* are failing.

Gandhian scholars on the one hand highlight the great potential of the *panchayati raj* system in light of Gandhi's ideas, while, on the other hand they confirm its inefficiency in the democratic practice at the grassroots level. Tridip Shurud elaborates on the expectations that were raised by the introduction of the system and its failure over the last two decades.

I think that panchayati raj legislations and institution building that were done under Rajiv Gandhi's government, specifically the work that was done by Mani Shankar Aiyar as the minister for panchayati raj, had great potential in terms of devolution of power to the panchayats. In terms of also... devolution not just power but also... trying to bring them into the planning process, trying to bring them into the decision making process in the sense that they decide as to what resources, or how the resources should be allocated for that community. Had great potential. [...] So there is a possibility there. I don't think we have pushed the idea of panchayati raj seriously in the last 15-20 years, so it remains a possibility.

But I think that the work that the government has been trying to do with, let's say creating... linking panchayats through a network, allowing panchayats to talk to each other, sharing their ideas, sharing their problems as also their solutions... If that network actually were to get through, and if all or large number of panchayats were to be connected, not only to Delhi - but connected to each other - I think that we have a great potential. So, the work that was been done with the national infrastructure project, I mean in the sense of creating a project of connecting the panchayats with each other, and also connecting them to the national knowledge network, would have creative implications (interview Tridip Suhrud).

Peter Roland deSouza maintains that the *panchayati raj* provisions were introduced with the objective of rural development and to oppose the oppression of caste, patriarchy and land feudalism. 'The amendments sought to tackle this power matrix [of poverty, caste, land ownership and patriarchy] by redesigning and reforming the existing panchayati raj institutions. The political elite and the policy community developed an institutional design that included and sought to involve disadvantaged groups in governance' (deSouza 2003:105). However temporary, deSouza's analysis already recognised the tendency to delude expectations and is prone to declare what the *panchayati raj* made possible. Indeed, as underlined by Suhrud, most of these promises remain to be realised.

Prem Anand Mishra alerts us of the difference between Gandhi's *swaraj* and the current *panchayati raj* system and of the fact that the village and its interconnection with the rest of the country is much more advanced compared to the villages that existed during Gandhi's time. Finally, he explains the penetration of the market in Indian society down to the level of the village and its regulatory function at the grassroots level.

Self-sufficiency - this is Gandhi's idea of the village; self-reliance - this is not in modern panchayati raj. It is more about [...] a facilitator of the government. It has become an agency of government now. It doesn't give emphasis on self-reliance or self-sufficiency. So when you talk about [...] that how it can be changed, in favour of Gandhian, first you have to take the self and spontaneity within the village. And of course this is a very great question because the village is not isolated as Gandhi accepted and at Gandhi's time it was. [...] So now only one thing, that I think one can do is, to make them understand and aware about their neighbourhood. [...] Who decides about the fate of villages? This is the basic question. You see the centre decides of this, I mean the government, and not even the government. Today I say: market decides about the fate of villages. If you once see in the villages, you will see that they have changed now, the market decides what they should do, they should produce... cotton or they should produce wheat, or you know, they should produce opium, or they should produce tobacco. Market decides. And that's why you will find out the whole thing that, debt offer, suicide of the farmers, everything. Because this is a market based production (interview Prem Anand Mishra).

Some of the shortcomings of the *panchayati raj* explain how is it possible that the introduction of a political provision in line with the Gandhian vision of devolution and

decentralisation fails to result in a democratic response. Firstly, it is a measure that emerged top-down and that was adopted by the elite to propagate their social and political hegemony. *Panchayats* are dependent on the central government to develop (or at least from state governments), and are not a grassroots instrument of democratisation. The *Panchayati raj* is also an instrument of party penetration into the country side where party politics is more stagnant. Secondly, they have favoured the market as opposed to people and community engagement at the grassroots, quite the opposite of Gandhi's idea. Finally, the system empowers representatives more than assemblies; this is the root cause of their democratic failure. The 'model villages' of Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar built their success on visionary representatives (surpanches) who empowered the assembly and acted as facilitators. The failure of this system does not stop social mobilisation at the base which is somehow inbuilt in the Indian democratic spirit, and in movements like the MKSS, the CBO, or the 'Arvari river Parliament'. These movements and organisations would have to revolutionize their way of working, and to some extent, neutralise their own work in case that the *panchayati raj* transforms in a bottom-up system. The AAP case is a similar but different response, as it is a movement that, by entering into politics, pretends to change the political system, including the *panchayati raj*, in order to make it consistent with the Gandhian spirit of *swaraj*.

5.2.5 From activism to legislation

Bridging civil society with institutions, or forming a party to contest elections, the AAP's founders have distressed many social activists who believe that social activism should be free from party ties. However, it is the conjunction of state and civil society that is another reason for the AAP's emergence and affirmation. In a way, Kejriwal brought *swaraj* from the social struggle into the institutional struggle.

The *India Against Corruption* campaign gave Kejriwal great visibility in his role as lieutenant alongside Anna Hazare's, something which is part of the AAP's background on *swaraj*. Kejriwal's activism in participatory processes goes back to the year 2000 with his experience in *Parivartan*, an NGO through which he operated in Delhi worker's districts. Kejriwal later cooperated with the grassroots movement *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS – Workers and Farmers Power Union) that was coordinated by Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey

and Shankar Singh in Rajasthan.²¹¹ He then joined the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI, headed by the MKSS), whose objective was to obtain the Right to Information (RTI) that allows citizens to request access to institutional documents, including public program record books, from institutions. Kejriwal extended the campaign in Delhi and introduced the participatory experience of public audits and inquiries in line with the work carried on by the MKSS (Baviskar 2010). Aruna Roy explains the bottom-up significance of the campaign and the application of the RTI:

[T]he Right to Information Campaign that has grown organically and dramatically over the last fifteen years in India, has facilitated a new politics to emerge. It helped people understand the modes of democratic governance, and the RTI, by accessing different aspects of democratic governance, unpacked the concept. Every one brought their experience and priorities to shaping it. It did not emerge from the media alone. The substance of the RTI has emerged from this long battle of looking at governance and its constituent parts and exploring the avenues for citizen engagement and intervention. Not merely as interpreted by bureaucratic practice, but in a bottom exercise which created space for citizens groups to focus on social justice, equality, and development/economic entitlements. Most importantly, in the emerging rights based discourse, the RTI helped bring economic, social and political rights together (interview Aruna Roy).²¹²

Roy elucidates in what sense the RTI is a concrete step forward in the struggle for transparency, anti-corruption and citizen participation. The campaign that they promoted for fifteen years has strengthened people's political awareness and has reinforced their self-consideration as the actors of governance who can demand information and transparency from governors. As Srivastava mentioned earlier, the media have also been important for this civil activist campaign, but it is the persistence of people's actions that brought the change about. The long campaign reinvigorated a discourse on rights that brought together and united the economic, social and political dimensions. It has been a 'knowledge born in struggle', with participatory practice at its base.

With the matured empirical experience of the *Parivartan* and the MKSS, Kejriwal and his colleagues, once in institutions, were able to direct the effort of the AAP towards legislative advance. The AAP stepped forward in realising *swaraj* with the 'Delhi Nagar Swaraj Act'

²¹¹ Visvanathan maintains that the MKSS, the IAC and the AAP are three responses to consumerism and neoliberal politics, although all different in form (Visvanathan 2014b).

²¹² Regarding the AAP, Roy affirms: '[t]he AAP does not have any worked out concept or practice of decentralisation. Nor does it even have a structure of decentralisation within its party. Even the concept of *swaraj* is yet to be detailed in a manner in which the common citizens, including me can understand it better' (interview Aruna Roy).

(known also as ‘*swaraj law*’ or ‘*swaraj bill*’) whose main objectives are to define the way the *mohalla sabha* should function and which power it will have also in relationship with the central government.²¹³ What such legislation foresees is that the *mohalla sabha* works through a *mohalla samite* (neighbourhood association) based on gender equality, reservation for minorities, oppressed castes and indigenous peoples, and is dimensioned in clusters of around 3-4000 people. Gender equality is a requisite in the coordinating role of the *mohalla* together with transparency and accountability. The ‘right to recall’ is implemented in cases where there is a request by part of the council with the vote of a qualified majority. The *mohalla aims to be competent in* the areas of education, health, security, and social welfare (including care for the poor, elderly, disabled and other vulnerable people). The *mohalla’s* mandate should include the power to receive information from government officials and municipal bodies, to manage the budget and hire workers, to punish and reward government officials, to deliberate about the use of land in its constituency, to decide on alcohol shop licences and more. Varun, a sociologist, Gandhian scholar and the AAP national leader, explains that the *swaraj law* is the instrument to implement *swaraj* in the city.

In the contextualisation chapter above I analysed the introduction of the *panchayati raj* system as an instrument to implement decentralisation and participation. This is one of Gandhi’s legacies that is still in the making and the AAP attempts to enter in this longstanding debate with a fresh approach as it enters into its empirical experimental phase within institutions.

5.2.6 Economic and ideological dimensions

Gandhians underline that *swaraj* (self-rule including democratic decentralisation) without *swadeshi* (economic self-sufficiency) would make little sense. As was explained by Suhrud (interview), *swaraj* or democratic decentralisation implies different notions of production, distribution and consumption that are sensitive to local needs and are outside or are at the margin of the neoliberal market. The ideas of *swaraj* that are incorporated in the

²¹³ As of 1 March 2016 no official document of the law was circulated. The information here collected have been gathered from the interview to Varun and on the media (Headlines Today 2014; Pandit 2014; Tyagi 2014). Delhi Residents Welfare Associations criticised the missed publication of the full text law and the fact that *mohalla sabha* can come to co-opt its non-partisan associations affiliates, forcing them into the party-politics logic (Polanki 2014).

modern *panchayati raj* legislation fosters decentralisation as state agency, and develops local political, economic and social life in the bigger framework of national interest, and aims to do so in a top-down rather than a bottom-up approach. A top-down *swaraj* is a contradiction in terms and brings the debate back to the political-colonial *status quo*, which implies domination by the market, as Mishra highlights: '[w]ho decides about the faith of villages? This is the basic question. You see the centre decides of this, I mean the government, and not even the government. Today I say: market decides about the faith of villages' (interview Prem Anand Mishra). With respect to these points, the AAP is lacking behind because it merely centres the notion of *swaraj* on the political dimension, and only vaguely addresses the political-colonial fragmentation of social and economic life. Starting from Kejriwal's '*Swaraj*' (2012) and then going through the 'Nagar Swaraj Bill', one finds that there are only general assumptions that the *mohalla* and *gram sabhas* must decide how to spend their own funds, while no political vision is provided to suggest as to how this can happen.

The AAP economic vision (Aam Aadmi Party N/A) opens up to an alternative model of development that is oriented towards uplifting the marginalised and delivering autonomy to local administrations when it comes to managing state funds (as opposed to project oriented funds). It is, however, still imbued with individualism and centralism (a top-down approach with delegation of competences from the centre to the decentralised government) rather than community self-sufficiency. No mention is made of how the AAP would create the conditions necessary for a community-based economic *swaraj*. This economic vision is ecological and alternative to mainstream centralism but it lacks behind in terms of democratic potential. While the AAP's political *swaraj* is based on the community, its vision of an economic *swaraj* is fragmented and centred on the government's role in fostering individual entrepreneurship or the community as a subordinate of the state.

The AAP's vision of the economy remains fundamental in the implementation of the 'Jal Swaraj' or water *swaraj* (Aam Aadmi Party 2015e). Devolution, however, needs to be further articulated in terms of providing conditions of sustainability and economic self-sufficiency. In the Gandhian vision, 'democracy can be more effective and more participatory only if there is not centralisation and then decentralisation, but there is something called

“devolution”, which means it has to evolve bottom-up and not first centralise and then decentralise’ (interview Pratibha Jain).

Translating the economic into an ideological discourse, the AAP is outspokenly neutral claiming to follow no ideological guidelines and stating that its ideology is participatory democracy. The AAP is criticised for occupying this ubiquitous position. Despite this, it is a strategic characteristic innovation that deserves further analysis.

Other parties consider the lack of a formal ideology by the AAP to be a weakness. Veena (interview), spokesperson of the Congress party interviewed in Jaipur, maintains that the AAP’s lack of ideology implies that it has solutions for simple problems but lack long-lasting solutions for Indian issues. She also stresses that this ideological vagueness is due to the diversity of the people that joined the party and have different and contradictory views. Without an ideological framework, she believes that the AAP is destined to be short-lived. Having a very similar perspective, Professor Bhowmik from Mumbai adds that the AAP misses a class identity (interview Sharit Bhowmik).

Social activists, such as Aruna Roy, maintain that the credibility of many IAC leaders was drawn from their previous participation to the campaign for the Right to Information. The IAC, however, incorporated a wider ideological rainbow that included all social groups struggling against corruption. ‘The rainbow coalition did not necessarily agree about larger issues of economic and other issues of equality, such as secularism and eradicating poverty’ (interview Aruna Roy). The AAP inherited this lack of ideological vagueness. Srivastava stresses that an ideological orientation is fundamental, as to count on good people and good will alone is not enough (interview Kavita Srivastava). Mimroth and Kumar, *Dalit* activists, believe that by affirming their lack of ideology, the AAP shows a lack of structured vision for the future, and therefore also fails to provide a vision to tackle the *Dalit* issue. A similar view is held by *Dalit* activist Amarjeet (interview II), who believes that the main political ideology of the AAP is to dismantle the corrupted political system. The Gandhian activist (secretary of Gandhian memorial trust) Ram Chandra Rahi points out the relationship of ideology with the concept of development and underlines the point that the AAP needs to show a different model of development with respect to the one based on the centralisation of power and funds, in order to truly penetrate the meaning of *swaraj*. In the current mainstream model of development,

capitalism and corruption are strictly linked. Therefore, the AAP needs to show how to tackle both in order to win this model of development out. To tackle the second, they must first tackle the first and work on the decentralisation of power and against the centralisation of the power by big corporations (interview Ram Chandra Rahi).

The AAP's discourse on ideology is reluctant to concede that good politics only occurs in the old ideological framework and they tend to subvert the logic. Deepika (interview) maintains that anti-corruption, 'gram swaraj and decentralisation of power is our main agenda. We are trying to change the system to do that.' Shyam (interview), an AAP leader, restates the centrality of anti-corruption by affirming that 'there is nothing wrong with capitalism, but the problem comes when capitalists get into collusion with politics, because then they start manipulating the policies governing their own ambitions.'

For the AAP, the distinction between liberal and socialist extremes is obsolete. The party advocates that state intervention should protect individual entrepreneurship while controlling the collision of corruption and capital. Varun (interview) clarifies that the position of the AAP is centred on *swaraj*, this is the ideology beyond the centrality of either the state (socialist) or capital (liberal) developed in the XX century:

Swaraj meaning dignity of labour, fair play for the rich - they pay their taxes they make their profits, why not? - [...]. So there has to be a healthy economic system where we have our rights and duties and state is monitoring it. [...] By using old labels we are trying to show academic and intellectual lethargy [sic], there is something new. Capitalism, socialism... are useful labels to understand twentieth century economic models and systems.

We are against four Cs, one is crony capitalism, actually corruption at high places, crony capitalism, centralisation and communalism and casteism. [...] And then the answer is swaraj, which is participatory democracy, politically, which is economic justice to all, which is social dignity and identity and personal ethics. [...] What we are not is very clear. We are not communal, we are not capitalist, we are not socialist. But then they say: "you don't have an ideology". We say swaraj is an ideology. [...] In the] XXI century human beings are trying to reinvent democracy to decentre the state and capital and re-centre the citizen. [...] In the XX century, [the] state got centred and [the] citizen got decentred, in the soviet model, and capital become the centre and citizen become the periphery in the liberal democratic model, and everywhere party became the face of society, pattern of society, guardians of society. We have got to reinvent, the relevance and the need and the value and the functions of citizenship, and that is participatory democracy (interview Varun).

The AAP's ideology is *swaraj*, that is politics centred on citizens, with a strong state that intervenes as a mediator to equalize the excesses of power and wealth. This kind of ideology is a political trump, because it is of a different kind with respect to ideologies as they

have emerged in the past. While socialism and liberalism are centred on a theoretical framework from which a methodology is derived, this ideology is centred on a methodological framework from which a theoretical framework is derived. To translate it into Gandhi's philosophy then, for Gandhi, ends and means must be equally valid and valuable, therefore truth and non-violence are bound together. While mainstream ideologies give precedence to theory and ends, a participatory ideology gives precedence to the methodology and the means. The AAP advocates a new citizenship centred on duties, the main one being participation. The question is how do you make sure that from a valuable methodology there will follow valuable political ends and objectives. The practice, as opposed to the theory, shall provide the answer to this question. Practice is based on the assumption that with a trans-scalar approach, from the bottom-up, from the local to the global, personal commitment and responsibility (i.e., duty and participation) act as a guarantee against alienation and subversion of the political ends and a form to reconcile societal conflicting interests for an innovative political dialogue.

To conclude, the AAP offers an innovative proposal to implement a decentralised and participatory framework for local democracy through *swaraj*. So far, it has contributed towards innovating both concepts and the political landscape. Despite this, however the overall project needs to face and solve the challenges and details of the political, social and economic realities to come, in order to be able to reassert its effectiveness.

5.3 Leadership and participation

The issue of leadership is puzzling in all movements, organisations and parties that advocate participation and equality as a principle. On the one hand, horizontality implies equality of power sharing, on the other hand, both to unite and to operate with efficacy requires forms of organisation that involve notions of coordination and leadership. How does the AAP deal with this challenge? Social activists working on the ground experience on a daily basis the difficult dynamics of participation, and so too does the AAP whose discourse is based in an anti-elitist struggle. Indeed, the AAP's discourse advocates for the subversion of the elite with a new, subaltern elite, emerging amongst 'honest' common people. Besides the simplistic character of this discursive argument, the AAP has adopted participatory recruiting processes that are virtually open to all people who are willing to compromise. The first experiments were

uneven and generated a divergence that contributed to the first resounding case of expulsion of four national leaders. The way this case was handled, and the whole controversy surrounding it, signalled to the party the demanding task to combine participation and representation. The response implied unity and openness to compromise and kept the representative potential at the expense of the participatory ideal. Additional controversial points raised around the process to select candidates, they have led to criticism and opportunities for improvement. Other pre-electoral participatory instruments are the collective writing of electoral programmes and manifestos that were adopted by the AAP. This whole approach and its incredible impact on the AAP's electoral performance, driven by the socially sensible and ethical leadership, has produced a political upshot that has affected the whole Indian political sphere while providing theoretical evidence concerning the interaction of leadership and horizontality.

5.3.1 From the bottom-up

The AAP's appeal to *swaraj* is a call against political elitism and for an increase of the participation of the common people in political decision making arenas. As is argued in this work, the political subjugation of society by the elite is a deviation from the democratic idea – and therefore is a form of political-colonisation by an elitist and procedural representative form. On the one hand Nikhil Dey agrees with this view, while on the other hand he challenges the alternatives by bringing in the reality emerging from the base, as he advocates for the trial of the experience at the grassroots:

[I]n democracy how is power dispensed? So, yes, I agree that there is a colonisation of representative democracy but it's inherent within the system. So, it's inbuilt. [...] You then build one system on another and you explain [the] parliamentary systems of democracy. But actually you are taking it away from its basic roots. In those basic roots there are complex questions, because we have seen the other side of it (interview Nikhil Dey).

Swaraj implies a democratic idea starting from the bottom, from below, in a political space where the work of social activists constitutes a primary source of experience and point of observation.²¹⁴ Rajendra Singh, is a renown Gandhian social activist, chairman of the NGO

²¹⁴ Narayan Desai (interview I), elderly and experienced Gandhian activists who worked with Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, underlines that the competition among different activist is high. They look for social recognition and prizes and such pretension at times create barriers in the cooperation among them. During my fieldwork in India, I could sense the meaning of this observation. A number of activists echoed this point of view, Asif (interview) poet and AAP member affirms that Kiran Bedi refused to be the AAP's prime

Tarun Bharat Sangh (Young India Association), and is also known as the ‘water man’ as he has led a process of water management centred on people’s participation that revived the arid district of Alwar (Sebastian 2001). Throughout the years, he has led the creation of the ‘Arvari River Parliament’, which includes representatives of tens of villages, and is a concrete experience of Gandhi’s *swaraj* applied to water and resource management. He affirms: ‘If you believe in the power of the people, and you have some faith and trust for the people, and the common future of the people in the present situation, so you can create interaction with the people’ (interview Rajendra Singh). Singh stresses the need of horizontality and bottom-up empowerment that social activists achieve by trusting the wisdom of the people. This is somehow the same approach used by the AAP. Although the AAP is in its first phase, the party is working on *swaraj* from a different angle, focusing on the urban (Delhi), rather than rural areas and is targeting a wide political framework rather than a specific social and economic contextual dimension. The AAP primarily targets a political objective; use *swaraj* against the political elitism of liberal democracy. It is important to understand how the AAP has combined this objective, which needs centralised party leadership, with the emancipatory potential of *swaraj* – that is people’s self-rule.

One of the working groups at the creative workshop organised at the CGS focused on ‘Political Swaraj from the Leading Political Elite’ (Jain et al. 2014). Participants in this group underlined that the issue of political self-rule affects all social classes. The group also showed that people working on this issue are social activists, social movements and NGOs, and that they are continuing the historical work of Indian pre-independence social activists (such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Motilal Nehru).

minister candidate in Delhi’s election 2013 (position offered by Kejriwal) because she was jealous of Kejriwal success. There is no doubt that Kejriwal and the AAP widely inspire esteem and raise expectations among activists for the ability to build a collective political enterprise. As I argue in the analysis, many social activist have joined or supported the AAP, many others remained outside but recognising the innovatory characteristics – especially during its first year of activity and the 49 days of government in Delhi in 2014. In this phase, the movement dimension of the AAP was more influential than the party dimension. However, interviewing some social activists I could detect some bitterness for Kejriwal’s success. The idea that social activist enter the political system does not find universal agreement among social activists, many of them criticises the AAP leadership for this step into the smarmy territory of party politics. Leadership in a political enterprise such as the AAP, as we will see below, implies centralism and the role of Kejriwal is challenged by the need to keep the party united and the objective of remain horizontal and participatory.

The group's main argument is centred on the awareness that is raised among citizens and their capacities to struggle for their basic fundamental rights. Rajendra Singh had identified the Rajasthani peoples main sources of rights violations in their lack of water and was able to subvert such violations via three decades of fieldwork in which he engaged and organised people's response.

The AAP targets more general violations and aims to create a political culture that can apply *swaraj* in different contexts and needs. The participants of the working group have argued that in order to achieve political *swaraj* there is a need for political reforms that allow common people to control the elite. These include the right to recall, the right to reject, party transparency, accountability and candidate selection (of political parties). This, for the AAP, is a central issue that shall be coupled with the idea of participation that is inbuilt into the concept of *swaraj*. I will investigate how the AAP is facing the challenges of transparency, accountability, (horizontal) leadership and bottom-up participation.

5.3.2 Internal structure and candidate selection

There are two dimensions of the AAP's attempt to produce a different kind of elite: the first is its structure, while the second is the selection of candidates, and I engage in a critical assessment of both. On the AAPs 'how are we different' webpage, the first point displayed refers to the AAP's structure and reads: '[t]here is no central high command in Aam Aadmi party. The party structure follows a bottom to top approach where the council members elect the Executive Body and also holds the power to recall it' (Aam Aadmi Party n.d.). The party's 'organization and structure' is detailed in the party's constitution (Aam Aadmi Party 2015b), its five bottom-up organisation are: primary, block, district, state and national. Starting from the district, the structure of each level includes a Council, an Executive and a Political Affairs Committee. The election of a representative and coordinators within the party must occur by consensus admitting recourse to voting as a last resort when consensus fails, as is included at the state and national levels. There are provisions to reduce gender and caste imbalance within the party although they are limited or vague.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ After the constitution women minimum quota are 5 out of 25 members of the district and state executive council and 7 (out of 30) in the national executive. The national executive council in March 2016 counted with 16 members all men: seven of these members form the national Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

Notwithstanding the bottom-up approach, the constitution states that the most powerful body of the party is the national executive, whose work is implemented by the national Political Affairs Committee in the customary executive routine. These therefore are the two main bodies within the AAP with the power to recall the national convenor. Regardless of the state or national level, all AAP office bearers shall '[n]ot have any pending criminal case of a crime involving moral turpitude or should not have been convicted of any such crime in the past' (Aam Aadmi Party 2015b Art. VI.A.b.ii) and '[n]ot be a part of any organization which spreads disharmony on basis of religion or caste or promotes untouchability' (Aam Aadmi Party 2015b Art. VI.A.b.iii). Other clauses include: transparency in finance, a moral lifestyle, political terms within the party that last three years and party representatives can hold the same position for two mandates.

Besides the internal structure, the party regenerates the political elite by selecting candidates in elections. When I asked how he envisaged the way the AAP will handle power in view of the political system change that the AAP wanted to bring about, Arvind Kejriwal answered in line with the mainstream message sent out by the party and not far from political propaganda: '[w]e want to hand over the power to the people. If there is concentration of power then there is lot of corruption, there is lot of arrogance, there is lot of wrongdoing that takes place. So we want to hand over the power to the people' (interview Arvind Kejriwal). At the time of interviewing Kejriwal in Delhi (the end of February 2014), he had already resigned from the AAP's 49 day-long Delhi Government and was preparing for the national elections that were to be held in May. In order to contest in as many constituencies as possible the AAP was recruiting likely candidates from civil society, the business sector and from other parties, and did so not without internal disagreement (PTI 2014b). This is also the argument that preoccupied a number of social activists that were interviewed. Therefore, I asked Kejriwal how the AAP will be able to foster a new political culture by embracing people from other parties that bring their own mind-set. His response was: '[w]e take only good people, only those people... in extraordinary circumstances only we take people from other parties. We

In April 2016 new elections took place electing 7 (out of 25) women in the national executive and 1 (out of 12) in the PAC (PTI 2016b, 2016c, 2016a). Further reservations concern executive councils and the national council that 'may co-opt up to 5 members in order to give fair representation to disadvantaged social groups, such as SC, ST, Backward Classes and Minorities, in case any of these groups is underrepresented' (Aam Aadmi Party 2015b).

don't normally take people from other parties' (interview Arvind Kejriwal). Next, I insisted on how the party would make sure that these new people would remain in the logic of the party and he responded as follows:

We have taken so many people earlier. Only one person deserted us,²¹⁶ rest are all working fine. So it is... we are talking of India. India consists of hundred and twenty-one crore people [1,21 billion], we are not talking of this party, that party, we are talking of everyone. So all the good people, from all sections of society are welcome (interview Arvind Kejriwal).

Kejriwal advocated the party's accurate selection of candidates and sustained that the procedure they followed was overall successful and empowering. He also stressed the complexity of a politics in India with its huge population and the variety of society, thereby advocating for the representation of social diversity within the party. However, Kejriwal's words hide the complexity of leadership and the leader's selection behind personal good will – which is certainly a fundamental characteristic, but not enough to attain to the responsibility and challenges of political leadership based on *swaraj*. All political parties can dispute the arbitrariness of “choosing good people” therefore the AAP needs to go beyond good intentions to remain consistent with its anti-corruption and decentralisation standpoint. Varun (interview) underlines that the AAP has to create a new elite from those oppressed, something that Dipankar Gupta calls an ‘elite of calling’ (Gupta 2013; interview Dipankar Gupta), and underlines the ticklishness of this task which implies to make leadership relationships horizontal and self-regenerating from the bottom-up:

Now the AAP has to take it beyond creating a self-perpetuating elite among the deprived and underprivileged sections in order to lead to mass emancipation and unity of all weaker sections which will in turn strengthen democratic citizenship and nation-building. If we fail in doing this, we will continue to confront a system of elitist identity politics based on vertical solidarities which make horizontal mobilisations of people increasingly difficult (interview Varun).

Varun highlights the delicateness of the selection of leadership that needs to focus on the marginalised and oppressed and create mechanisms in which the elite emerging from

²¹⁶ Kejriwal was most probably referring to Vinod Kumar Binny who was elected twice as independent MLA in Delhi's election of 2007 and 2011, he benefitted of Congress Party support over a period. In 2011 he joined the *India Against Corruption* campaign and later on joined the AAP as one of the more experienced politicians in the party. In December 2013 he was elected Delhi MLA with the AAP. The issue that created a conflict in the party is related to Binny's exclusion from the Party's list of ministers for the first cabinet. Binny openly accused Kejriwal of being dictatorial and later on the party of not complying with the promises made to the people of Delhi (Ali 2014; Anuja 2014; Panwar 2014).

the margin can reproduce itself. If successful, the new leadership will bring emancipation, where if unsuccessful, it will increase the despair and the challenges for those willing to look to participatory and grassroots political action.

5.3.3 Participatory recruiting processes

The AAP has understood from the beginning that the recruitment of respectful candidates is a key element to renovate the political system. The selection of candidates finds detailed elaboration in an early documents such as the AAP vision document (Aam Aadmi Party 2012). Paradoxically, beside this procedure being an important innovation, it was criticised for being too elaborated on in this early document (Shukla 2013). The AAP's candidate selection processes aimed at fostering participation, transparency, engagement and identification with the electoral constituency (Lalchandani 2015; Roul 2014; Tripathi 2013).

Prior to analysing to what extent the AAP has implemented this democratic innovation, I shall briefly describe the procedures adopted. In order to campaign for the AAP, candidate applicants have to collect at least 100 signatures from the constituency in which they would like to run for elections. This is the same as saying that 100 voters of the electoral constituency nominate a person for the AAP electoral ticket. In national elections the number of constituencies electing one Member of Parliament total more than one. For instance, if they are eight, the candidate then needs to collect 800 signatures in order to be eligible to apply for the AAP election ticket. Candidates need to fill in the AAP candidate application, which requires giving a detailed list of signatures, and to elaborate on their: motivation, their own and their family members' previous experiences in social activism and politics, economic situation and criminal records.

The Party's screening committee makes shortlists of five candidates for each constituency. Shortlisted candidates are then publicly scrutinised, as their names are published on the party website and social media in order to assess the candidate's reputation (with a focus on criminal records and social reputation). Party's volunteers of each constituency rank the five shortlisted candidates in secret ballots. Finally, the AAP Political Affairs Committee (PAC) interviews the candidates in order to make the final decision

(considering also the AAP volunteers opinions) on who will run for election in each constituency (Aam Aadmi Party 2012, 2014c; Chowdhury 2013).

The Delhi elections of 2015 marked an exception to the selection process as the PAC played a prominent role in confirming the candidates that either won a seat in 2013 or arrived close to winning (Kaw 2014; PTI 2014c; Shukla 2014).²¹⁷ The final list of candidates was thought out strategically by the PAC in order to win seats, more so than to include new candidates from the bottom up, and as a result it included a high number of wealthy people and people with criminal cases pending (Kaw 2015), in contradiction of party-movement's premises. Coincidentally, the process was the cause of the major crisis inside the party, the Bhushan and Yadav case (see also Ghose 2015; Marathe 2015; PTI 2015a; Radhakrishna 2015; Singh, Wal, and Singh 2015; S. Visvanathan 2015b).

5.3.4 Questioning participation within leadership

The young history of the AAP includes controversy around the leadership, such as the expulsion of two founders of the AAP, Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav. It was the result of a process that took place during March and April of 2015,²¹⁸ and has raised some issues about internal democracy – and *swaraj* – and therefore about the AAP's democratic potential overall. Bhushan and Yadav were accused of plotting against Kejriwal and the AAP as they desired to make a national strategic plan, with more engagement of the party-movement in other states besides Delhi (Ashraf 2015; Ashutosh 2015a, 2015b). Kejriwal's desire was to concentrate the AAP's efforts in Delhi after the landslide victory of February 2015. Bhushan and Yadav – whom were also considered party ideologues – claimed that they advocated internal democracy, transparency and *swaraj* (Sriram and Anand 2015; TNN 2015a, 2015d).

The two leaders were expelled from the deciding body of the party (Political Affairs Committee), from the National Executive and as spokespersons. Bhushan was also excluded

²¹⁷ Kejriwal had already expressed his positive vision for the capacity of a candidate to win their seat in the election (Kejriwal 2013).

²¹⁸ Personal issues between Kejriwal and the expelled leaders seems to be among the main causes of this case. Yadav explains that the existence of differences of vision and uneasy situations between him and Kejriwal occurred since the beginning and that Bhushan helped him to settle the disputes in various occasions. Eventually the situation become critical before the Delhi elections 2015 and they all agree that it would be resolved after the elections. Yadav was nonetheless surprised for the method and the form adopted by Kejriwal to solve the issue (Yadav and Tripathi 2015).

from the Disciplinary Committee which he headed. The situation precipitated during the candidate selection (criticised especially by Bhushan) for the Delhi state elections of 2015, but came out into the open after the victory of February 2015. The implementation of the procedures followed for their expulsion raises some questions. For example, their exclusion from the National Executive took place at the National Council Meeting of the 28th of March 2015 (Anand and Sriram 2015; Dhawan 2015; Dhawan and Lalchandani 2015; PTI 2015b). The party's internal *lokpāl* (or ombudsperson), Admiral L. Ramdas, was not properly consulted on the issue and was asked to not attend the meeting in which the two leaders were expelled. Admiral L. Ramdas openly expressed his disappointment with such procedure and was removed from his position a few days later to be substituted by a body of three persons close to Kejriwal (Special Correspondent 2015). While the AAP leadership claimed that the post of the internal *lokpāl* had expired, the statute also foresaw for the outgoing *lokpāl* to nominate his successor, something which did not happen.

Throughout the issue, the power of Kejriwal to create support for his own position among other members of the party, and manage internal procedures so as to achieve his wished result (expulsion of the other leaders), came to the surface. In the aforementioned National Council Meeting, he made a moving speech in which he declared that he could not work with the two leaders and asked the audience to choose between the duo Bhushan-Yadav and himself. Then he left the meeting, the two 'dissidents' were not allowed the possibility to defend their position and the audience then voted for their expulsion. The nature of Kejriwal's power in the party as well as the AAP principles are questioned by these events (G. Gandhi 2015; PTI 2015d; Tripathi 2015; M. Visvanathan 2015; S. Visvanathan 2015a). This case shows very clearly that the AAP opted for internal consistency and solidity as opposed to horizontal participation when threatened with fragmentation. While Yadav and Bhushan formally requested more horizontality and internal democracy, their request was received as a threat to the political stability of the party-movement and the majority of the national council's members favoured stability with respect to horizontality.

Other members of the National Executive were expelled along with Bhushan and Yadav, namely the two leaders that were negotiating the conflict for them against Kejriwal's side, Anand Kumar and Ajit Jha. Rakesh Sinha, the National Executive leader from Uttar

Pradesh was suspended after a few days of expressing disagreement with the expulsion procedure (Sriram 2015) and Medha Patkar, renowned social activist in Maharashtra, quitted the party in disagreement with the expulsion (Rashid 2015). A Few days later, Christina Samy (TNN 2015b), a women's rights activist from Tamil Nadu, resigned from the National Executive, being the last woman of that body, and only men made up the Political Affairs Committee. For the editors of one of the most prestigious academic publications in India, *Economic & Political Weekly*, this case marks the end of the AAP dream to renew politics, the same thing that happened to the Jayaprakash Narayan movement at the end of the 1970s (Editorial 2015).

On April 14th, 2015 (Ambedkar birthday anniversary), Yadav, Bhushan, Kumar and Jha, organised a meeting titled 'Swaraj Samvad' (dialogue on *swaraj*), a democratic consultation participated by 4000 members of the AAP in which the final decision (voted in favour of by 70% of the participants) was to remain in the party-movement and continue the internal struggle for *swaraj* (Radhakrishna 2015). They opted to form the 'Swaraj Abhiyan' (*swaraj* campaign) a movement (not a new party) aimed at extending the implementation of *swaraj* within the party (Reporter 2015). A few days later, the four members were definitively expelled from the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party 2015f; Mehrotra and Sanyal 2015), but they however have kept the social and political movement *Swaraj Abhiyan* active.

This case shows the centrality of Kejriwal in the party and raises concern regarding the way internal participation can be combined with the political leadership necessary to form a winning electoral force. Different views and approaches had emerged when some of the leaders (i.e., Shazia Ilmi and Madhu Bhaduri) left the party in disagreement with the central leadership. However, the Bhushan-Yadav case was much more complex because it exposed the vulnerability of the party structure and procedures, this for a party that pretends to make participation its central value. This pretention is therefore questioned by the centralism that on the one hand permits the party to amalgamate and fortify itself, while on the other it subverts the ideas underlying the party's novelty.

Not all these arguments justify the position of the editors of *Economic & Political Weekly* journal, as this case does not mark the end of the AAP's dream to renew politics. Although this case has deluded many sympathisers and has had repercussions that will need to be analysed over time, it must be read as a concrete response to the challenge of a growing

political party in a conflictual neoliberal political arena. On the one side, Kejriwal defended party unity and the pragmatic work that had been done in the polity of Delhi, especially after the deluding results of the national elections of 2014. On the other, Yadav and Bhushan advocated the radicalism of the core values of the party, namely *swaraj*, and wanted to work simultaneously with Delhi to expand in other states contesting elections across India when possible. The issue became flagrant because of the sensational victory of the party in 2015 and because attempts to settle divergences of view in silence within the party did not achieve concrete results. The very concept of *swaraj*, which implies transparency and openness, to some extents, was an obstacle to the silent settlement of tectonic differences of political views within the party-movement. The AAP sorted these out with a questionable application of party procedures and charismatic leadership polarisation ('choose between me or them'). The majority of the party has decided to keep the AAP united and focused under the guidance of Kejriwal, although this implies to renounce, at least partially and temporarily, the application of *swaraj* to all parts of the party-movement itself. It is unmistakable that, regardless of how much one likes this or not, this is a political compromise, a response that maintains the AAP within the constraints of representative competition. The Bhushan-Yadav case is a landmark in the trade-off between participation and representation within the AAP, and while it is a weakness in a sense it is also a step forward towards political maturity.

5.3.5 *Innovations and challenges of participatory processes in leadership selection*

In the early stages of the candidate selection process, before the first electoral victory in Delhi in 2013, Kejriwal had highlighted strengths, weaknesses and challenges raised by the selection process. On the one hand it allows the filtering of candidates by motivation (as well as all other characteristics), but on the other hand it includes the possibility of raising hostilities amongst those within the party who are not selected, and thus provides instruments for subversion from within and outside the party (Kejriwal 2013). The candidate selection procedure raised criticism since its inception from people external to the party (Anuja 2013; Danish 2013). The selection process adopted in the Delhi elections of 2015 confirms that 'winnability' was among the most important – if not the most important –

criteria for the assignment of the electoral ticket.²¹⁹ This implementation of the AAP conciliation between representation and participation – achieve representative power to have a mandate to implement participatory politics – is a compromise with the participatory approach in selecting candidates. The discretion of the PAC – which has the last word on the selection process – is both a point of electoral strength as well as a democratic weakness in terms of the participatory approach; even more so if the PAC is over-powered by the national convenor.

The complexity of the process, the challenge of completing the selection process in rough electoral politics, and the perplexities that it can leave behind, are well represented by the story of Amarjeet, a *Dalit*. A former bureaucrat, Amarjeet, had applied for a ticket with the AAP in the national elections of 2014. Being a *Dalit* he applied for a reserved seat in Rajasthan. In order to apply for the AAP's candidature Amarjeet had to collect at least 100 signatures in each of the constituencies including in the seat for which he was applying. Therefore, to comply he collected more than 800 signatures. Amarjeet is native of a different city as he lives in Jaipur (which are non-reserved seats). In order to collect signatures from people in the seat he was applying for (Rajasthan), he had to invest his free time and incurred a range of expenses that included the production of materials, transportation, accommodation and food, both for himself and for a few volunteers that helped him out. This is as the AAP does not support such expenses.

In the first interview (which took place on the 3rd of February) Amarjeet was preparing his electoral application and collecting support from the grassroots in Bikaner. He was aware but acritical about AAP's absence of discussion and programme for the uplift of the *Dalit*, considering that the democratic innovation that the party wants to bring about would tackle the issue. Amarjeet genuinely trusted the AAP democratic perspective, held Kejriwal's '*Swaraj*' book as a reference and considered the AAP to be an heir of the Gandhian vision of democracy. He had a different perspective two months later, however, when we had a second interview on the 5th of April. He believed that *swaraj* was impractical and advocated modern urbanism to alleviate caste oppression; he spoke much more of Ambedkar than Gandhi and he was

²¹⁹ For instance, the AAP candidate Fateh Singh in Gokulpuri, was a former BJP well known *Dalit* face in one of the three reserved constituencies which the party lost in 2013 (Lalchandani 2014).

disillusioned by the AAP. Amarjeet maintained that initially he was attracted by the novelty of the party but was disillusioned after observing the AAP from within. He believed that the Bikaner ticket was assigned to Gaurishankar Dabi by a non-transparent political decision of the leadership of the party. Amarjeet was not informed of the reasons why he was not selected or shortlisted, nor was he notified of the results. He felt as though he was simply ignored by the party after having worked hard to apply for the ticket.

Amarjeet was convinced that his work would serve the AAP's electoral campaign. He believes that the AAP plays 'caste politics' as other parties do because they allow *Dalit* applicants to run for elections only in reserved seats, thus keeping general seats to higher castes, 'they have not given ticket to any reserve candidate from non-reserved seat' (interview Amarjeet). This case confirms what challenging task it is to combine electoral politics with democracy as *swaraj*.

In contrast, the AAP's Rajasthan leader, Dr Rakesh Parikh, provided some positive criticism right after the failure at the national elections of 2014:

The most important task for us was to screen the best possible candidate among the common people who applied for candidature under the banner of AAP. Additionally we had to search for the deserving people who may not have applied but would be better if they join the political process. Mood of the nation was for change and it appeared right time to send good people to parliament.

With our search committee we got really good people who surely deserve to represent us in parliament. They have a track record of decades of selflessly serving people. We were fortunate to have candidates like Dr. Virendra Singh, Dr Virendra Vidrohi, Dr Narendra Gupta, Dr Velaram Meena. We also got really good candidates through screening process like Major Dr Surendra Poonia LT Gen Raj Kadyan K K Saharan and others. A few dedicated volunteers of AAP were also fielded.

Not just common people or journalists, leaders of rival parties too conceded that we had best of the candidates much better than theirs [sic]. This was one of the battle we won. We could convince good people from society who always stayed away from politics to join active politics [sic].

While fielding candidates we didnt consider cast [sic], religion or financial status of the candidate. Deserving common people with political background getting a chance to contest election irrespective of their cast [sic] or religion was a victory in itself.²²⁰

²²⁰ Rakesh Parikh Facebook page on 17 of May 2014:

<https://www.facebook.com/drrakeshparikh/posts/703605366365159>

Parikh post confirms that the selection was open to intervention by the party in the identification and motivation of candidates and that the process was not merely screening candidates. He finished the analysis about the deluding results at the national elections by asserting: '[o]ur weaknesses- Poor organizational structuring, lack of resources, organization was largely controlled by central leadership and we probably sounded too arrogant and self obsessed' (*ibidem*). Parikh highlights the relevance of the national leadership in selecting candidates, something that we would see emerge as a bigger issue in the next year. Most importantly he reasserts that the party was still under-structured and not well organised to cope with the challenge of approaching such a massive selection of candidates as the one needed for the election of the biggest democratic country in the world. In fact, many criticised the AAP for contesting as many as 432 candidates (out of 543 in the whole of India)²²¹ at the national elections, claiming that it was a too big shot for such a young party. This provides no justification for the case of Amarjeet, but it certainly gives it some background and an overall whole picture of the complexity of the situation leading the AAP to that strategy.

Amarjeet's case may be held as a lesson for the AAP and for others, as it testifies the need to keep transparent records of all stages of a delicate and innovative process such as the selection of candidates. In the first semester of 2014, the AAP was still a very recent enterprise with a weak organisation based on volunteers and many activities of the party were faced with good will as well as lack of appropriate organisation. This explains, but does not justify, the lack of transparency or information. In the context of a political scenario that is biased by corruption and which the AAP wanted to subvert, this level of process transparency is fundamental to avoid any doubts on the proper fluidity and rectitude of the process. Moreover, the communication stream needs to be readily available, bidirectional, well structured, open to inquiries and ready to provide difficult responses, which are, nonetheless, acceptable in the overall ideal and honest practice of the party-movement. A last consideration is that the AAP's candidate selection procedure can be criticised (and hopefully improved) because it exists and it is a political innovation with a great potential, but the AAP has much more to do in order to increase its democratic implementation.

²²¹ This figure is striking compared to the two deep-rooted national parties BJP (contested 427 seats) and Congress Party (contested 462 seats).

5.3.6 Participation through collective manifestos

There are other methods used by the AAP to increase participation (as well as electoral support) on the occasion of an election. For instance, the AAP adopts pre-electoral consultations for the definition of the party's electoral programmes and electoral manifestos. The AAP's critics recognise that the party had been working for a long time to prepare its electoral manifesto for the 2015 Delhi elections and that the BJP's manifesto, which appeared weeks later, included many of the ideas presented by the AAP (Seetha 2015). With the 'Delhi Dialogue', the AAP organised thematic consultations on issues that were collected with a door-to-door campaign that started in September 2014 in view of the Delhi elections of February 2015. The main themes were: 'Jobs and Employment, Women Rights & Safety, Social Welfare and Social Justice, Energy and Electricity, Health, Rural Delhi, Enterprise: Trade and Industry, Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, Transportation, Education, Land and Housing and Water' (Aam Aadmi Party 2015d).

Additionally, the APP possesses party collective manifestos, something which is not new for the party, as since the first elections in 2013, it aimed at producing constituencies' manifestos after consulting local people in the electoral districts of the Delhi state (Aam Aadmi Party 2013a; Khandekar 2013; PTI 2013a). The difference is that in 2013 the AAP focused on each constituency, while in 2015, it collected issues of reference for the whole city and organised thematic meetings that started on the 15th of November. The Delhi Dialogue provided a chance for the party and Kejriwal to reconnect with voters after the acknowledged mistake of resigning from the 49 day old Delhi government and the following electoral debacle of the national election (TNN 2015c).²²² The drafting of the national manifesto in 2014 involved a number of thematic committees that included experts, social activists and academics. These committees contributed unevenly to the formulation of the final document that was assembled by party cadres. This manifesto is the least transparent with respect to

²²² Once elected the AAP created a Delhi Dialogue Commission, to carry on the work of Delhi Dialogue, terms of reference are: '1. To advise Government of NCT [National Capital Territory] of Delhi on governance and technological solutions to various problems afflicting Delhi. 2. To evolve strategy (s) for expeditious implementation of the recommendations made by the Delhi Dialogue Commission. 3. To suggest from time to time, remedies to overcome the bottlenecks experienced in implementation of the recommendations of Delhi Dialogue Commission. 4. Delhi Dialogue Commission may constitute Task forces/committees, on various subjects consisting of experts, to advise it for the fulfilment of the vision of Delhi Dialogue Commission' (Delhi Government 2015).

the involvement of the people at the national level, something that is partly due to the vastness of the enterprise. The national manifesto took over and developed the political line which had originally been expressed in the vision booklet, drafted when the party began.

The AAP's mobilisation before the elections (be it in the form of candidate selection, production of the manifesto or campaigning) was done to sensitize voters to support the party. The practices that were used implemented participatory democracy before the representative one and was in favour of the same. The former supports the latter and strengthens the 'representative claim' of the party.

5.3.7 The 'AAP effect' and leadership's reputation

The reputation of the AAP leadership starts from Kejriwal, who accounts for his own activism, especially during his time in the *India Against Corruption* campaign working in Anna Hazare's team. The reality, however, is more complex than that. Some of the participants which attended the creative workshop (that was organised at the AAP office) underline the personal appeal of their leaders. Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia are Vipassana meditators,²²³ and Sattvic²²⁴ food eaters:

Because these people have followed that medium of meditation, the right food, eating Sattvic food, because of which their thoughts are like this. And that's why he [Kejriwal] had the guts and courage to stand and say "I am and stand opposite to Sheila Dikshit in contesting elections and make her loose" (participants at the creative workshop at the AAP office).²²⁵

The AAP activists highlight their moral identification with the main leader of the party, demonstrating that his private life is part of his public prestige and political strength. This is an echo of Gandhi's own immersion in public life and of his making of himself, and of his no-longer-private life, a symbol of India. Gandhi preached practices that he would first

²²³ Vipassana is the meditation technique created by the Buddha. It was preserved in schools of meditations especially in Myanmar and returned to India through the teachings of Satya Narayan Goenka, a man of Indian origins. The Vipassana meditation technique is not a religion nor a school of Buddhism, it is a method to practice self-purification and the art of ethical living (Goenka 1987, 2007, n.d.; U ko Lay 2008; Vipassana Research Institute 2011).

²²⁴ Sattvic food lead to non-violent thinking and living. It is based on seasonal and vegetarian ingredients. Tamasic food brings instead violent thoughts and behaviour; it includes food with a sedative effect on the mind including meat, alcohol and some vegetables such as mushrooms.

²²⁵ Sheila Dikshit was the Congress chief minister of Delhi for 15 years in the raw (1998-2013) and lost her constituency nominal election against Kejriwal in 2013.

experiment with himself. He then used to lead through his own example.²²⁶ His spiritual life became a public issue and this is what made him an icon. In Kejriwal's personal life, we see an attempt by him to emulate the Mahatma, as he provides his own political leadership with a moral stand in order to be able to grant consistency to the struggle against corruption. This approach is based on the personal integrity and sober life-style of the AAP leadership, and starts with Kejriwal.

The term 'VIP Culture' is used in India to describe the cultural arrogance of the political elite that justify privileges and personal security needs being paid for by tax payers. As a result, elected representatives assume a social symbolic distinctive value that grants them public recognition and facilitates this culture.²²⁷ The 'AAP effect' is the definition assigned to the moralisation of the political-elite that followed the AAP's emergence in the Indian political debate, and is the opposition to the VIP culture. For most of the people interviewed, including activists, scholars, politicians and journalists, the AAP has contributed to the VIP culture being put into question. A former AAP leader and dissident, Madhu Bhaduri, describes the implication for the Indian political sphere as follows:

The Aam Aadmi Party ignited enormous hope among people who viewed the corruption driven present political options with complete cynicism. AAP held out the hope of a political alternative offering corruption free and dynasty free participatory democracy. It promised an alternative where Gram Sabhas and Muhalla Sabhas would allow people to decide their own priorities. AAP offered to change the existing system in favour of one where officials would be accountable to the public and transparency in accounts would replace the existing system of flow of public money into private pockets of politicians and bureaucrats. The party actually achieved what had seemed impossible. It fought and won elections in the Delhi polls recently without black money and without sacks of it. Claims that such a thing is not possible were belied, proven wrong. This was an impressive achievement which sent the party's popularity soaring. AAP's disdain for VIP culture and immediate rejection of it was also

²²⁶ Aruna Roy underlines that 'Mahatma Gandhi's entire debate about ethics and public life was not narrowly defined. He talked of ethics in relationships between all communities and nations. He was killed for his belief that ethical action should be just and equal. [...] Gandhi died before he could really come to any kind of reconciliation and truth issues between Pakistan and India, and the Muslims and Hindus being butchered. His life was cut short' (interview Aruna Roy).

²²⁷ The VIP Culture includes privileges such as: security escort and bodyguards, five stars hotels for meetings, expensive house for living. State flights with official aircraft or first class as opposed to commercial flights in economy class, blockage of roads to prioritise political elites' movements in the city even in peak hours, use of car beacon, reserved parking for public (non-political) events and so on. For Veena (Congress spokesperson) the AAP effect was just a façade, even when the BJP Chief Minister of Rajasthan – Vasundhara Raje – spoke of ending VIP culture in the State right after her own re-election in Rajasthan and the AAP positive result in Delhi (Singh 2014). Amitabh and Karanvir (BJP representatives, interview), confirm the opposition of VIP culture without highlighting the prevalence of the AAP effect on the matter, implying standard BJP opposition to such cultural practice.

applauded. It even made politicians of long standing who loved the perks of power to appear ready to trim them (interview Madhu Badhuri).

Bhaduri maintains that the AAP has brought to the fore of the Indian political sphere basic concepts that the political norm had diminished to the marginal. The AAP contributed to changing this with the belief that a political alternative was not impossible, that corruption, the VIP culture, and power familiarism were not the unconditional tragedy of India, and that there was a way out. This hope built up support for the AAP, something that started from their leader and the civil engagement of the leadership as a whole. The participation to the 'AAP effect' has spread from the centre to the periphery, from leadership to activists, in a reversed tendency with respect to a grassroots approach. The AAP would not be thinkable without its leader and his whole symbolic discourse.

The AAP instilled the sober lifestyle of Gandhian social activists within the political culture of the country, which has departed from the Gandhian example. The lifestyle of social activists in India is a heritage left by a traditional culture, and with the Mahatma it was combined with the political sphere. Gandhi's life-style was in contrast to that of the colonial elite and he wanted to avoid having Indian elites behaving as British ones. According to Professor Vyas, Gandhi is the moral reference of public politics to which all elites need to apply and it is a reference that the AAP applies closely: 'the influence of AAP is not only what is being done in Delhi by their government, but the impact they are making in all political parties. Everyone now tries to, at least, pose as if they are very simple, totally uncorrupted, common to the people etc., etc.' (interview Vijay Shankar Vyas).

The AAP's moral stand has kept the ability and capacity to attract Indian social activists²²⁸ and thereby gives the party an innovative political face. The AAP is a party-movement in which the closeness of social activists, together with their popularity and social prestige, becomes a factor of political affiliation and, most importantly, of renewed hope. Kavita Srivastava (interview), a social activist, did not join the AAP and maintains some criticism towards the party, however she does underline how the party was able to win a battle from the social activism front: against the political elite the AAP was able to bring the

²²⁸ Although the centrality of the leadership has later discouraged some of them from their engagement in the party as seen above.

political struggle within the electoral domain. In other words, the AAP entered the political elite's space – marked by electoral results - and this is *per se* a victory in the struggle of the people against political-elitism – or of the people who are oppressed by an elite led state.

[H]uman rights violation will get further. So then, you have got to check this through the lens of caste, class, because we are so stratified. So see what is happening to women, what is happening through the class lens, the caste lens, through the minority lens, through the patriarchy gender lens. So you are going to see through all these lenses, and you find that human rights violations, perhaps are on the increase but our own work is to engage in a peaceful way. Engage, turn around. [...] Through alternative, through our politics, through our alternative politics. We try to subvert all these institutions [...]. And the success of the AAP is that they did something that nobody could do, which is: turned around the most corrupted and the most criminalised of all the systems, which is the electoral political system. [...] There AAP managed to make a dent. And that's the interesting story. Then I am talking to you about other spaces that we could attack. But now we have seen this new emergence. How long they will last we don't know, but they made history. Even if they finish today, they made history. They could do it, which none of us could (interview Kavita Srivastava).

Reaffirming the character of hope brought by the AAP, Srivastava maintains the importance of the positioned struggle of the AAP within the political institutions and, therefore, in the very complex and corrupted electoral system. If on the one hand Srivastava reaffirms the pertinence of the AAP to the social activism front, on the other hand she highlights the peculiar challenges in which the party-movement incurs due to its specific field of action- electoral politics. This may not justify derivation from the original participatory objective but may help one to understand the intricacy of bringing participation within representation; all of this chapter explores this argument. The voice of social activists is also echoed by Gandhian scholars such as Professor Pratibha Jain, who, in addition to Vyas, has stated her enthusiasm:

my excitement is that I see some kind of revival of Gandhian political culture in the... some of the concepts of AAP and the first part of it is, as I told you, people have greater say and participation in governance. You are taking into confidence; you are de-mystifying what was considered as [...] the common rules. So de-mystification of governance and giving greater say to the Aam Aadmi or to the common people. Relying on their wisdom. [...] One of the important consequences of the emergence of AAP is that it's creating [a] counter-movement in [the] so-called impregnable political system, for cleansing, for austere lifestyle, for simplicity (interview Pratibha Jain).

At least to some extents, the AAP leaves a political voice to a Gandhian perspective and to the enthusiasm of the Gandhians that is demonstrated by public support and people engagement. To do this, the AAP has filled the gap between governors and the governed and it changes the custom of politics so that things must not remain as they are. During her

interview, professor Jain affirmed that this is a paradigmatic shift similar to the one which occurred within Hinduism when Buddhism emerged in contrast to the rituality, puritan practices, monopolisation of the Brahmins, the rigidity of the caste and feudalistic system of the Hindu religion. As Buddhism created reformative dynamism in Hinduism, so too is the AAP creating a moralising reformative dynamism in other parties and in the Indian political system.

5.4 Equality and traditions

In the previous chapter section, I mentioned the moralising effect brought by the AAP in terms of publicity against corruption and in favour of social justice based on people's participation. Such dimensions involve a reconsideration of the fracturing topics of the Indian public sphere; among the most blatant of these, and which was already partially already touched upon above, is the subjugation of women and *Dalits*, as both of these produce social exclusion. An assessment of the AAP's discourse and efforts concerning these issues is unavoidable in order to consider the party potential to foster an alternative to political-colonialism. The AAP once more focuses on *swaraj* as the political condition to tackle the roots of woman and caste discrimination in Indian society. Numbers show that the women representatives and candidates of the AAP are slightly improving numbers compared to those of other parties, as the party's discourse further proportionates equality of gender within the party structure. However, these visions are disputed by former women members. In cases such as the midnight raid of minister Bharti, the party has given priority to its own ethical claims over the due attention of women concerned and for the attainment of women rights. Equally, in relation to caste, the Amarjeet experience and the relations of the AAP with khap *panchayats* both return a blurry picture. The symbol of the broom well represents the AAP party's discourse, a powerful emancipatory symbol recalling participation, anti-corruption, unity, equality and uplift of the lower castes. The attainment of these objectives emerges as a delicate relationship between tradition and participation, as well as between ideas and political challenges, to which the AAP discourse provides innovative answers while the AAP's actions vacillate in implementation.

5.4.1 *Swaraj overcomes discriminations*

The idea of equality characterises the concept of *swaraj*. Arun (AAP leader, interview) tells a joke to explain the AAP's position on religious discrimination: '[t]here are three kind of

parties. When one party wins, the Hindus fear, and, [when] another party wins, the Mussulman is under fear. And *Aam Aadmi Party* is [the only] party [with which] no Hindu, no Mussulman [are] under fear but only corrupted people and dishonest [are] under fear'. Together with *Justice, Liberty and Fraternity*, the AAP mentions *Equality* at the beginning, – and as a core value – of its vision document, and does so by quoting the preamble of the Indian constitution.

This section analyses how the AAP enhances the struggle for equality, especially through the categorical 'lenses' of gender and caste. In order to understand equality within the framework of *swaraj* (as developed by Gandhi and later taken by the AAP), the issues of culture, politics and social order developed in the Indian traditions are inescapable. For this reason the two issues, equality and tradition, are worked out together here. The critical analytical perspective adopted in the *epistemologies of the South* (see for instance Santos 2012, 2014) brings in a deconstructive dimension towards hegemonic thinking and a reconstructive dimension based on intercultural translation. As we shall see, the AAP's discourse has substantially contributed to the deconstructive effort and the developments to come will need to focus on reconstruction, especially following the party's electoral victory in Delhi in 2015.

The joke by Arun, mentioned above, reaffirms the AAP's main perspective concerning the party's strategy to enhance equality in relation to communal division. Moreover, it is also explanatory for other spheres of exclusions; for the AAP's *swaraj* shall slowly bring about social equality among all Indians, regardless of their religion, caste and gender. The AAP discourse maintains that the rise of literacy, participatory political culture and human dignity will all gradually uplift the social position of the worst-off and excluded. In the long run, castes will also be deactivated from their oppressive component because in a society of equals there is no space for community-based discrimination. Likewise, women will increasingly gain space with the rise of their education and with the social awareness of their right to equal dignity with men. The AAP discourse acknowledges that this change requires time and much social work, but it states that this is the way to bring about emancipation from below, as opposed to a top-down granted award (that would mean to be received as a gift), something which has proven difficult to implant and that would not last in the long run.

The AAP advocates that emancipation needs to be based on dignity and self-rule in order to be authentic. This is because emancipation from above – is an exception to a *status quo* that is not questioned as such – while with *swaraj* the AAP claims to target real emancipation with substantial changes. The AAP activists and leaders that have been interviewed for this study belong to different castes (that range from the lowest or outcaste (i.e. *Dalit*) to the high caste (i.e. *Rajput*)), and they all support this kind of position. The AAP's senior leader, Shyam, member of the National Executive and member of the Political Affairs Committee, maintains that dignity will induce social equality as opposed to affirmative action:

What we are trying to get them [Dalit] is dignity of life - and dignity of life is what they have always been asking. They do not say that "give us reservation", none of them says that. They are not there to keep asking for reservations. They say that "give us work, give us... if it is a government work or service then provide us a permanent work". Most of them have been involved in many jobs as a contract employee which has no certainty of their livelihood. Change that model - that is good (interview Shyam).

Shyam's remarks point to the fact that oppressed groups claim equality, not a special status. They desire an equal life with a stable job and a socially integrated livelihood, things that imply the substantial subversion of the social system of discrimination. This subversion, in the AAP discourse, is *swaraj*. The party advocates the reconstruction of social justice through a revision of the existing provisions to implement *swaraj*, one example of which is the real improved operationalisation of the *panchayati raj* in the Gandhian spirit. This is argued to be the instrument to struggle against the oppression of caste, patriarchy and capitalism, but not a mere political-colonial system of domination, but rather a real instrument of emancipation from below.

[Panchayati raj] is victim of dominant caste and patriarchy. In the village system there is a large section which is voiceless. The living culture of silence. And they need to be empowered. They are still incomplete citizens: women, they have a gender problem. Then people of lower classes and lower castes, the poor and the weaker sections. So I think the present panchayati raj requires a radical change, and there is need of both, citizens' capacity building through adult education, gender sensitisation, promotion of castelessness in our ways and habits, respect for the dignity of labour and the poor. That's the one thing and the other thing is the structural significance or the macro democracy where you give it more statutory powers, more transparency and more life. We are given very limited financial powers. Money is given to the local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) then more money to Member of Parliament. So they are in a competition of populism. There is no check on corruptibility. Right to Recall has to be there. [...] the panchayati raj, I mean that's where democracy is actually matter of bread and butter. So the soil is there to be done. This was there in the vision of India national movement, it is there in the constitution of India also. But it has not been... So that part of our limbs of governance is to be strengthened, is very weak is like a child with polio. Has limbs but they are useless for the purpose of working for

the purpose of governance. So this is where Aam Aadmi Party wants to create alternative politics which is more citizen-centric, less party-centric. Which is more down to earth than in the ivory towers of the air-conditioned chambers of parliament and assembly. Which is more around citizen-power than money-power (interview Varun).

Varun reaffirms the reasons why the *panchayati raj* system does not operate as it should and constitutes an obstacle, rather than a support, to participation. The system has been customised by the same logic that is inbuilt in the political-colonial system; it has been co-opted in the logic of centralisation, parties, patriarchy, caste discrimination and elitism where the different representative levels compete for electoral support with the brute corruption of targeted funding. The AAP's subversion was envisaged by the freedom movements and is codified in the constitution. What is missing is its implementation, therefore making it a missed opportunity for India. In this framework the AAP is raising alternative democratic claims centred on citizen's participation and on the daily needs of the grassroots.

5.4.2 Contexts and figures of the struggle against marginalisations

In 2013 in the Delhi Assembly, nine *Dalit* representatives were elected with the AAP out of twelve in total, and the three women that were elected were all AAP MLAs.²²⁹ The uplift of women is a declared objective of the AAP. Women's safety and security was one of the central issues of the electoral campaign in the Delhi elections and helped drive the AAP victory in 2015.²³⁰ The Nagar Swaraj Bill assigns coordination of the *mohalla sabha* to at least one woman out of two coordinators. However, women participation in politics is a complex cultural issue. When asked why the AAP had only three and not 14 women out of the 28

²²⁹ The AAP nominated six women candidates in the Delhi elections 2013 and again six women (two less than BJP with eight women candidates and one more than Congress with five), who all won, in the Delhi elections of 2015 when the AAP won 67 seats (PTI 2015c). In 2013, Rakhi Birla was minister in charge with 'social welfare and women and child development' departments and developing a plan for women security. No women were present in the cabinet in 2015; beside being a unjustified decision of the AAP to have only men ministers (Sharma 2015) this is a step backwards compared with preceding cabinets of Delhi which had a tradition of including one or two women since 1996 (Sikdar 2015; Singh 2015). In the *Lok Sabha* elections of 2014, the AAP nominated 59 women candidates out of its 432 total candidates, resulting in a percentage of 13,6% which is higher than the other major parties (13% Congress and 8,9% BJP) (Zee Research Group 2014).

²³⁰ Women's security was the 4th electoral promise which moved the people of Delhi to vote for a party out of 98 promises listed in CSDS survey of 2015, and it was the 5th most important issue for voters out of the 59 listed (Kumar 2015). The AAP intensified its effort to debate how to increase women's safety during the electoral campaign (Aam Aadmi Party 2014d; Sikdar 2014a, 2014c). However the AAP was unable to provide an alternative strategy to other parties, so it worked on women victimisation and protection and on the creation of a deterrent to violence against women, not on the emancipation of women and their freedom (Bhasin 2014; Saikumar 2015).

elected MLAs (in the 2013 Delhi assembly), Deepika, representing progressive women in AAP answered that the AAP tries to have as many women as possible, but explained that it is a difficult task to identify and motivate women for public office. Varun, explains the challenge related to the social stigma to which women are subjected and which limits their predisposition to enter public service:

For a woman to become a candidate in assembly or parliament elections is too personal and too dangerous. All her biography will be discussed around her character. Men are not talked about that. Men are talked about how they make money and not "you know she is working with him... she must be much more... you know... that just working with him. Where is her husband? Most of the families get broken." So, for a woman to enter this man's work is very difficult. [...] AAP is trying to be different but women are not coming forward. I mean, AAP cannot change culture overnight, but yes we contribute (interview Varun).

The attempt of the AAP to break the cultural divide between men and women in Indian politics is a complex matter that requires tectonic changes with huge social repercussions, and, after Varun, the AAP is striving for them with women support. Rajeev Bhargava affirms that it is too early to say what the AAP is achieving but that 'they will not get rid of caste or religious identities. I think they will try to democratise them and to make them more egalitarian' (interview Rajeev Bhargava). This statement finds confirmation in the official discourse of the AAP which maintains that 'what is required is a carefully crafted set of policies and affirmative action together with continuous efforts to change patriarchal mindsets and attitudes at all levels' (Aam Aadmi Party n.d.). As seen before the overall objective is to change the system, but the immediacy requires positive actions as responses.

Being more optimistic is Deepika, a member of the *Progressive Women at AAP*,²³¹ a group of highly educated and working class women taking initiatives to strengthen the participation of women in the party by supporting mainstream activities and raising funds. Deepika confirms that it is a challenge for women to find time for party work but she is convinced that for those willing to step forward there is the right space in the AAP, as many are already empowered and equal to men. Deepika affirms:

AAP does not think of woman as woman segregated and doing only a bit of activities like gender equality or woman welfare. We are part of the mainstream of the party, where all important decisions are channelled through the woman members. [...] There is internal

²³¹ In August 2014 the AAP set up the *AAP Woman Wing* or *Aap Ki Mahila Shakti* (Aam Aadmi Party n.d.). Publicity and information concerning the *Woman Wing* or *Progressive Women at AAP* are scarcely available in English.

democracy in the party, which is spelled giving equal rights and equal opportunity to woman, to have the same policy making. [...] That's how the party works, on complete equality among gender (interview Deepika).

Deepika recognises the social stigma towards woman who enter politics but she also believes that once having passed through such difficulty, the AAP is a party where women can contribute to the mainstream activities just as men do. She believes that in the AAP women are not relegated to marginal activities and she estimates that at least 40% of the AAP volunteers are woman. She confirms the AAP's effort to allocate more space, including in elections, to women. She also maintains that in Indian society the burden of corruption is primarily bore by women who run the house and suffer the consequences of bribery and unjust interactions. Deepika therefore believes that it is common-sense for women to be the actors of change.

5.4.3 *The controversial Bharti case*

The statements above demonstrate the AAP's attitude to find alternatives to the current *status quo* of exclusionary customs and social behaviour towards women and lower castes. However, the party has collected some criticism for the discrepancy between its discourse and its practices. The Bharti case is an example that helps one understand this kind of criticism. Somnath Bharti was the law minister of the first AAP cabinet of Delhi in January 2014. Bharti received complaints concerning four African women living in the Khirki extension of Delhi. The women allegedly conducted a prostitution racket and used drugs. During the night of the 15th and early morning of the 16th of January 2014, encouraged to intervene by some of the residents, the minister invited the police to conduct a raid on the house of the women and to arrest them for prostitution and drug use. When the police refused to intervene due to lack of procedural and legal conditions (lack of a search warrant), the minister insisted that the police were unwilling to do their duty.²³²

The police protected the women from the mob gathered by Bharti's presence and convinced the women to conduct a legal drug test, to partially accommodate the grievances, something which eventually did not prove the use of drugs. The whole accident exposed the African women to publicly humiliating treatment. The only woman in the AAP cabinet, Rakhi

²³² India's union government, as opposed to Delhi state's government, controls the police of Delhi state.

Birla,²³³ was present with Bharti in Khirki, and she supported the position of Bharti and was unable to provide due support to the African women (Express News Service 2014; Nigam n.d.; Sharma 2014; Sharma and Kant 2014). The AAP did not take a stand against the minister, on the contrary, it defended Bharti from accusations of racism and tried to find justifications for his action.

The Bharti case was the first big controversial case in the AAP's history and it opened up a huge debate in the media, with criticism being directed towards the AAP, including racism, xenophobia and patriarchy (Chaudhry 2014; Ghosh 2014b; Mishra 2014; Naqvi 2014; Sengupta 2014b:214, 2014a; Visvanathan 2014c). Madhu Bhaduri, co-founder of the party, an AAP leader and a member of the AAP National Council, raised her voice up against the behaviour of the party leadership within the party's structure. Faced with the unwillingness of the party leadership to hear the proposed apologetic position towards the African women, she quit the party (Baweja 2014; Bhaduri 2014). Here is a necessarily elongated segment of her story that gives a clear idea of the issue from the inside:

African women living in Khirki Extension were chased by members and supporters of AAP led by two ministers in an act of vigilantism in the dead of night and forced to submit themselves to narcotic tests. The humiliation of the women which was an attack on Insaniyat (humanism) was dismissed outright. That the results of the narcotic tests were negative were of no consequence. The AAP leadership remained adamant, not tendering an apology to the women and claiming instead that they were fully justified because they had studied the concerned tapes made by some TV channels. The fact that TV channels continued to hammer them was dismissed as motivated. In addition when some party members and well wishers of AAP (including this writer) tried to raise the matter in a party forum they were not only shouted down but also 'told not to make a spectacle' before the media; though no media was present. This shows AAP's commitment to participatory democracy and transparency. Presumably, like AAP government's present status in Delhi, participatory democracy and transparency should be kept in suspended animation according to party's convenience.

There is a lot of illegal prostitution in India. By some estimates there are 30 lakh [3 million] prostitutes. 40% of these are girls below the age of 13 years. It would not be difficult to chase and catch them. But where will they be sent? The African women in Khirki Extension can be deported back to Africa. Has AAP thought of where to deport or dump Indian prostitutes after it catches them? The fight against prostitution and narcotic trade is not on its priority list. What was the hurry then for a mob to target four African women?

There are a lot of people in AAP who have simplistic notions like technology will transform society, or that corruption is the root of all evil. But there are a few others in the party who understand exactly what corruption of policy and ideology means. What was exhibited in Khirki Extension by Mr Bharti and his mob was a corrupt ideology that is based on dominant

²³³ As mentioned earlier, she was Minister of 'social welfare and women and child development'.

prejudices and hatred of the 'other'. It was followed by an even more disturbing statement by Arvind Kejriwal to the effect that drugs and prostitution are causing rape. If he does not understand that rape has little to do with prostitution and even less with drugs, he could have consulted any of the others in the party who do. But he chose not to. Because the strategic calculation here is that we must empathize and reflect the dominant prejudice and worldview. The masses are always right. They have the weight of votes. That is why Khap Panchayats are to be celebrated. And that is why Somnath Bharti has to be defended. There are general elections coming, in Haryana and then nation wide. They must be fought and won at all cost (interview Madhu Bhaduri).

Bhaduri's sharp critique and decision to quit the party are explicit. She maintains that the AAP's priority is the support of the masses (representative claim) with respect to the rights and dignity of all persons. Bhaduri's allegation of vigilantism contends that the intervention of the law minister had subsumed the power of the executive with the power of the legislative and the judiciary. Bharti made the law, directly executed it with his presence and judged the four women guilty without any kind of trial other than street opinion and media notice. The more painful argument for Bhaduri is the unreadiness and unwillingness of the party to have given it a second thought, to listen to voices internally discordant with the mainstream vision, to listen to the plurality of its perspective in order to convert the incident into an enriching experience.

The AAP rejected the allegations of racism and patriarchy and accused the media for fuelling the polemic (Parsai 2014a, 2014b).²³⁴ The party-movement defended that Bharti had intervened on invitation of local citizens who had denounced the drug and sex racket a few times in the previous months, and in this way the party made a political claim that it intervenes when citizens' concerns are at stake, and does so differently from other administrations and institutions. The AAP sustained that Bharti had not acted against the women but rather invited the police to intervene; the party claims that this was a legitimate interaction by Bharti, who was also the elected MLA of the constituency. However, since police are under control of the national government, they did not follow Bharti's orders and for this reason, the AAP used the case as evidence that the Delhi police should be controlled by the state of Delhi, thereby

²³⁴ Deepika justifies the Bharti case, she maintains that the media had manipulated the video tape in which Minister Bharti was accused of racist language. She claimed that Bharti had carried on his duty with seconding a request coming from the people and intervening in such a way. Concerning the position of Bhaduri, Deepika maintains that Bhaduri was a respected AAP founder and senior leader who left the party for dissenting political opinions. The media, again, created a big case out of it. She believes that the party welcomes dissent and gives equal importance to opinions expressed by women.

advancing a second political demand. The same demand, full statehood for Delhi, was repeatedly advanced by precedent governments and was always rejected. Throughout the case, the AAP has defended its moral image, a morality linked to social acceptance and social recognition of rightness (no drugs, no prostitution), private customs and life conducts.

At least to some extents, the AAP has learned a lesson, because Bharti, although re-elected in Delhi in 2015,²³⁵ is not part of the second cabinet. However, the case raised severe criticism that is relevant in order to understand the AAP's relationship with equality and transparency.

5.4.4 Leadership, tradition and equality

Soon after the National Elections of 2014, Shazia Ilmi left the party in disagreement with the party leadership over the party's lack of internal democracy and for the marginal role in party affairs to which women had been relegated. Ilmi was the woman face of the party, as being a journalist by profession, she was often invited by the media to speak on behalf of the party. Her resignation, after Bhaduri's, highlighted controversial issues related to gender and internal democracy in the AAP (Barooah 2015; Ghose 2014b). Moreover, as highlighted in the Yadav and Bhushan case, the party has very few women in leading positions. If dissent is a reason for motivated and emancipated women to leave the party it implies that the patriarchal bias overrules the *swaraj* dimension within the party.

The Bharti case brings to light the existing tension between participation and traditions. It highlights how the moral standard of the community may come to undermine the basic rights and dignity of the individuals within it. In the Indian tradition this has been the main reason for caste discrimination and the main reason for the *Dalit* to prefer a city-slum to a caste-dominated village. Sharit Bhowmik maintains: 'the poorest sections, the lower caste people, they become slum dwellers [because they are] oppressed, in the villages, casteist, they prefer to come to the city' (interview Sharit Bhowmik). The city represents an ideal of emancipation from the traditional oppression of the village, as it is a form for one to look into one's future and emancipatory aspirations as opposed to remaining trapped within one's traditional religious, cultural and political identity. Electoral support in Delhi tends to show

²³⁵ Bharti was re-elected in the same constituency, Malviya Nagar, which includes Khirki extension.

that the AAP offered a political voice to such emancipatory aspirations. It has done so, on the one hand by focusing on the urban population while on the other hand bursting the idea of participation as an emancipatory innovation. By doing this, the AAP's discourse did not conjugate participation within tradition but rather with social progress.

Opposite to this perspective is when *swaraj* becomes a demagogic concept confused with the power of the community – or the mob – who takes initiative with the justification of a superior moral authorisation. In this case the *swaraj* notion of democracy is highly questioned. For many critics, this is what often happened in the *khap panchayats* which are a traditional, caste-dominated and male-driven form of community organisation (Dogra 2014). The AAP advocated dialogue with *khap panchayats* (PTI 2014a) and for Amarjeet, *Dalit* and non-selected candidate applicants of the AAP, thereby affirming its willingness to discuss using this traditional form of organisation, and implies a caste-based discrimination: '[t]hey [AAP] don't recognize, means they have closed their eyes, on the caste issue. First thing. Second thing, they promote... they are not against khaps. Khap is a village *panchayat*, [...] they are caste *panchayats*. [...] And they [AAP] are supporting them [khaps], they are openly supporting khaps' (interview II, Amarjeet).

Although *khap panchayats* 'perform a range of functions such as arbitrating disputes and carrying out social functions[, ... t]hese panchayats have been known to enforce oppressive measures against women or Dalit when they transgress the norms of their traditional social behaviour' (Mathur 2013:126–28). Bhaduri underlines the contradiction of the AAP in dialoguing with *khap panchayats*: 'What the party chooses to overlook is that Khap panchayats provide even brutal control to the land owning castes over the life of the poor and lower castes and women' (interview Madhu Bhaduri).

The AAP's openness towards khap finds a discursive justification in relation to a wide reconceptualization of these forms of community organisation. Dialoguing with them may serve the purpose that Rajeev Bhargava believes is the AAP objective, to bring *khap panchayats* under the constitutional framework, which would result in the prohibition of honour killing for instance (interview Rajeev Bhargava; see also Parsai 2014c). This objective has three potentially desirable outcomes: democratise the *khap panchayats* (including the relationship with women and caste); develop the *swaraj* dimension in India and make *khap* a

component in the dissemination of *swaraj*; and finally, contribute to the AAP's equalitarian potential and permit the party to fill the gap between tradition – with its legacy of gender and caste oppression – and the participatory dimension of *swaraj*. In this way the AAP represents a space to overcome the dualism of modern politics with tradition. For Shiv Visvanathan this implies that the AAP is able to go beyond the cynicism of politics and enter in political experiments that can expand democratic experiences (Visvanathan 2014a).

5.4.5 *The broom: rooting equality in the symbol*

Critically exploring the AAP's discursive democratic potential implies the consideration of its factual and symbolic dimensions. The symbol chosen by the party is elucidating, the traditional Indian broom. It is made of a bunch of twigs united by a wire at the hilt. This symbol is very powerful for several reasons: a) participation: all twigs are important in the broom but twigs alone do not work, only united can they do their job. b) Anti-corruption: one the AAP's main objectives is to clean Indian politics from the durst of corruption. c) Dignity and equality: this kind of broom is a traditional tool of work and dignity. d) Against social division: the broom is used by lower castes in their daily work, which advocates closeness of the AAP with the lower castes and struggle for their emancipation. Attending to caste discrimination, the broom used or touched by a lower caste person would not be used by a higher caste person.²³⁶

This symbol coincides with the political dynamic of the party, now that the Delhi Assembly has been swept by the AAP – thereby achieving the first symbolic dimension of the AAP – the party has an unprecedented possibility to work for the achievements of all other symbolic dimensions. After raising major expectations, the party has started shaky while going down this path, but without achieving its symbolic potential the failure of the party would not imply just another political disillusionment but rather a tumble for the dream of complementarity of *swaraj* with representative democracy.

²³⁶ Sunny Sebastian (interview) notes that when the AAP leadership make use of the brooms, for instance in a public gathering, they avoid using a second hand broom and use a new fresh broom that was never used by others. This implies that there is a latency between the intention of fighting discrimination and the committed practice for it.

6 Participation and internet evolution – virtualising traditional politics in search of (5 star quality for) democracy

In analogy with the empirical chapter on the AAP, this chapter does not enter into the details of the origin and affirmation of the 5 Star Movement (M5S – *Movimento 5 Stelle*) as this has been addressed in the contextualisation section. This chapter aims to analyse the democratic potential of the M5S by utilising a critical perspective of its political discourse. Due to the fact that the movement rejects the definition of party and its structural implications, this analysis considers the party structure of the M5S to be an extremely revealing category of analysis and therefore assesses it through the collected interviews that were had with the M5S representatives at all administrative levels. The M5S structure is analysed at the local level and in its national dimension, including the interplay of leadership and participation, and equality and power centralisation. The M5S resounds as the movement of the web, as its discourse and structure focus on Internet interaction. For this reason, a section is dedicated to the analysis of its electronic democracy (e-democracy) proposal, assessing the criticisms as well as its innovative potential. The analysis is framed within the socio-political context with reference to literature, the press, magazines, online sources and data gathered in interviews with scholars.

6.1 Bottom-up: Democratic idea and empirical experience at the grassroots

After the non-statute (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009a), the basic document of the M5S, it was known that it aims at expanding the role of common people (all users of the web) in governing and directing social, cultural and political issues of their concern through their direct and non-partisan involvement. The M5S advocates the democratic potential of the Internet and uses Grillo's blog to select candidates that would promote social, cultural and political campaigns and participate in political elections. Grillo decides the campaigns and the blog debates define the electoral manifesto (ideas and proposals), in continuation with the blog, events, civic lists and meetups. Certain questions are then raised of this process: what is the impact of the blog and national leadership in local communities? What is the organisation of the movement in its physical work? What does it mean to be open to all internet users – or to all people? What kind of democratic innovation does the M5S bring about at the grassroots? I shall answer these questions with the evidence emerging from the ethnography carried on

in the city of Latina, starting with the meetup groups²³⁷ present on the ground. The following sections elaborate on the following topics: understand the formation and development of the group, comprehend the reasons and political implications of its split, analyse the interplay of participation and leadership at the local level and the different organisational forms adopted by different groups.

6.1.1 *Latina's meetup group until the European Elections of 2014*

'The crickets and cicadas of Latina' (*I grilli e le cicale di Latina*) is also known as 'meetup 256' because this is its sequential number in the list of meetups created by Grillo's followers. Founded on 26 August 2006, chronologically it is the first meetup group of Latina.²³⁸ It started as a group of 'garagist' (few members used to meet in their own garages) to discuss and provide alternative information in the spirit of Grillo's Blog. They increasingly engaged in

²³⁷ In order to simplify, I refer to a meetup group as synonymous of a local community of the M5S activists. However, this is an approximation for two reasons: firstly, a local group can adopt meetup.com and/or different platforms, such as airesis, liquid feedback, parelon or a personalised version of a Content Management System such as wordpress (see also Federici, Braccini, and Saebo 2015:291). Secondly, the M5S local groups are not official M5S groups, but simply communities of sympathizers of the M5S, because Grillo assigns the logo only for the period of electoral campaigns or to elected representatives.

²³⁸ Two new groups were created in 2013 and 2014. The information below was collected and analysed on 28 October 2015 from www.meetup.com. The meetup group '5 Star – Women in Movement Latina Rome World' (*5 Stelle – Donne in Movimento Latina Roma Mondo*) was created on 3 March 2013. It shares thematic information mainly on public events and most of its members are from other cities (mainly Rome). The group is largely inactive, for instance between March 2013 and June 2015 there were only five meetings. The total number of meetup meetings organised is 17 of which: five were participated by one person, seven were merely informative posts (not meetings), out of ten real meetings, seven were virtual (forum discussion or online conference conversations) and only three were physical meetings and coincide with events organised by others. In some cases, such as on 31 July 2015, three meetings were organised at the same time, the same person is registered as having attended the 3 of them. The group works mainly in Rome and in other cities, and is therefore not focused on the territory of Latina. Due to its scope and organisation, this meetup group was not included in the ethnographic research.

On 24 August 2014 debuted '5star of Human Rights and Geopolitics - Latina' (*5stelle dei Diritti Umani e Geopolitica - Latina*) whose presentation on meetup.com reads: 'The group was created to address issues relating to human rights and their global regulation. The cases that will be studied will be analysed to find solutions'. This is a thematic group created to follow the international law case related to the incarceration of the businessman Roberto Berardi in Equatorial Guinea. It was created as a working group external to the meetup 256 to speed up the work necessary to follow the case (see the introduction of the founder of the meetup group Marinella Pacifico in *Coordinamento Meetup M5S Estero* 2014). Until the day of Berardi's liberation notice, 14 July 2015, the meetup work was focused on this case. Activists of this meetup group continued to participate in the meetup 256 and in '5 star Latina in movement'. The total number of meetup meetings organised is 49 of which: eleven were participated by one person, 22 were merely informative posts (not meetings), out of 27 real meetings, eight were virtual (forum discussion or online conference conversations) and 19 were physical meetings. Average participation is five people per meeting. This meetup was not included in the ethnographic research due to its thematic and geographical specialisation, and peculiar organisation (similar to a working group internal to another meetup).

bringing the political discourse into society, disseminating a magazine (called 'info B side') and organising awareness raising stalls.²³⁹

In 2011, activists of meetup group 256 participated for the first time in electoral politics with the M5S logo. Giuseppe Vacciano was the mayoral candidate at municipal elections. The group was unable to elect any representative although the result was encouraging for the low budget campaign (1,25% to the party and 1,34% to the candidate). In 2012-2013, activists collaborated with the other meetup groups of the region to prepare a regional programme and a list of candidates for the Lazio regional election of 2013. The province of Latina elected Gaia Pernarella as regional MP.²⁴⁰ Contemporary to regional elections, some activists participated in the M5S parliamentarians (primaries to elect the candidates for the national elections of 2013). In February 2013, two representatives were elected to the Senate (Giuseppe Vacciano and Ivana Simeoni) and one to the chamber of deputies (Cristian Iannuzzi).²⁴¹ Folco (M5S activist, interview) explains that during the time around the elections of 2013 many people approached the movement with enthusiasm, 'people were united on a new horizon, participatory democracy, direct democracy and honesty'. The growth of participation around the M5S cluster of Latina had been already registered in previous elections but the peak of 2013 was the highest. After a few months in parliament, Latina's M5S MPs matured a critical voice within the movement.²⁴² However, they were reluctant to openly express these views in the media, but did it within the M5S, mainly in the meetings of the parliamentary groups.

²³⁹ For instance, in preparation of the national referendum for the public management of water, against nuclear energy production and against the legitimate impediment of ministers to appear in courts (2011). Over time issues of interest touched upon the following areas: security and legality, agriculture, road system, urban planning regulations, transportation, health system, environment and waste management (with a focus on the dumping ground located in Borgo Montello – Latina), tourism and territory, energy (with a focus on the atomic power plant of Borgo Sabotino – Latina), water management (water as a common and public good), youth politics, culture and education.

²⁴⁰ At Lazio's regional level the presidential candidate (Davide Barillari) obtained 20,22% of the vote and the M5S as a list obtained 16,64%. In the municipality of Latina, Barillari obtained 21,42% and the M5S obtained 17,34 % of the vote.

²⁴¹ In the Municipality of Latina the M5S received 28,7% electoral consent for the chamber of deputies and 27% for the senate.

²⁴² They took some dissenting decisions such as Vacciano's vote for Pietro Grasso as president of the Parliament (Redazione Latina Today 2013) and they did not hide their disagreement with some decisions taken by the M5S leadership, for example on the occasion of the expulsion of senators Orellana, Campanella, Battista and Bocchino (Redazione Latina Today 2014a).

The European Election of 2014 marked a turning point for Latina's M5S group. Firstly, the electoral result of 2014 registered a diminution of electoral consent,²⁴³ and secondly the phase of euro-candidature produced some turbulence. A number of activists did not have the chance to put forward their names and experienced a lack of transparency in the process accusing Grillo and Casaleggio of deliberately restricting access to candidature.²⁴⁴ This discontent combined with the critiques of the three M5S MPs of Latina who did not fully support the European elections campaign, led to a number of activists being reluctant to participate in the electoral campaign (interviews Folco, Tullio and Anselmo). Those who presented their candidature on time or were less critical, organised the campaigns activities on the ground. This produced a fracture between those who were more critical towards Grillo and Casaleggio and those who blindly trusted Grillo (and Casaleggio).

6.1.2 Latina's meetup partition

The three M5S national representatives of Latina resigned from the parliament but not from the movement from which they were eventually expelled²⁴⁵ in December of 2014. After the expulsion of the MPs Artini and Pinna and the creation of the directory (Redazione Huffington Post 2014; Redazione Latina Today 2014b).²⁴⁶ The decision was taken due to an

²⁴³ The M5S obtained 21,16% at the national level compared to the political elections of 2013 when it received 25,5% (house of deputies) and 23,8% (senate). In the municipality of Latina the M5S received 24% at the European elections compared to 28,7% (house of deputies) and 27% (senate) at the national elections 2013.

²⁴⁴ Grillo and Casaleggio opened the timeframe to present candidature and closed it abruptly without informing their activists in advance. As a result within the few days between 26 March and 31 March 2014 the process had already selected the first round of candidates and shortlisted those entitled to participate in the second round. The M5S Activists had just 2 days to decide to put forward their candidature and prepare it (for example by way of a video presentation). This decision *de facto* marginalised the possibility of activists' cartel and manipulation, but carried an indirect negative implication in the democratic dynamics of a local group. Gianluca Bono published a blog post explaining the contradictions with the methodology, his dissatisfaction and unavailability to be a candidate (Bono 2014).

²⁴⁵ They declared that they would not engage with other political forces in the parliament and that they continued to adhere to the M5S principles and follow the decisions of the parliamentary group while voting in the parliament. Nonetheless, the respective parliamentary group leaders expelled them.

²⁴⁶ The directory is a directive body of 5 people that was nominated by Grillo and approved by the M5S registered activists in November 2015. Vacciano communicated to Grillo and Casaleggio his decision to resign three weeks before formalising the issue at the parliament, because he did not want to sabotage the M5S and favoured his substitution in institutional responsibilities. His decision was to leave his place to other M5S representatives that identified with the M5S political project that, in his view, had changed over time and with which he could no longer identify with. He was highly regarded as a professional and morally integer person, and both Casaleggio and Grillo attempted to convince him to reconsider his decision. Likewise, many M5S senators tried to convince Vacciano to reconsider but he did not change his mind and presented his letter of resignation from the Senate on 22 December 2014. He was followed in the short term by Iannuzzi and Simeoni who resigned on the same day.

accumulation of reasons, the decisive one was the creation of the directory that, for the three representatives of Latina, was contrary to article four of the non-statute. They maintained that the M5S was transforming itself into a traditional political party and leaving its original ideas and objectives behind.

The meetup group invited the three MPs to clarify their political position in meetup meetings between the end of November 2014 and the beginning of January 2015. Before formalising their decision, the meetup group encouraged them to carry on – without success. The three resignations accelerated the turmoil within the meetup group and led to the rupture among those who were more favourable and those who were contrary to the critical positions held by Vacciano, Simeoni and Iannuzzi towards Grillo and Casaleggio.²⁴⁷ In Latina, the polarisation between the ‘critics of’ and the ‘faithful to’ Grillo and Casaleggio reversely translated in closeness (critics) and distance (faithful) to the positions of the three MPs. Moreover, those more critical of Grillo and Casaleggio coincided with the group of organisers and of parliamentary assistants of the three representatives. Those faithful to Grillo and Casaleggio felt excluded from the core of the meetup group and believed that the group of organisers, which should merely hold organisational and administrative tasks, was *de facto* playing a political directive role for the whole group. The three cleavages dividing the two factions were: (a) affiliation with Grillo and Casaleggio – the critics believed that this was implicit in being part of the M5S, while the faithful claimed that this affiliation had to be clearly restated after the resignation of the three MPs. (b) Relation with the resigning representatives – the critics believed the 3 MPs should autonomously decide to leave the group or participate as mere activists, while the faithful believed that the meetup group should expel them.²⁴⁸ (c) Renovation of the group of organisers – the critics believed it had been democratically elected (in December 2014) but they were ready to step down after rewriting the rules of the meetup group, while the faithful believed that the organisers’ group should be immediately reset.

²⁴⁷ This division has emerged in other cities such as in Genoa, where Sabatini defines them ‘*Movimentisti*’ – activists oriented to social struggle and already active in social movements – and ‘*Grillini*’ – activists mainly inspired and faithful to Grillo (Sabatini 2015), as well as a national tendency, between ‘Taliban’ (faithful to Grillo) and ‘dissidents’ (holding critical views) (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2015:459).

²⁴⁸ The meetup group 256, after public deliberation expelled Iannuzzi and Simeoni ten months later, on 5 October 2015, with the motivation that they hold a political position which considers the M5S a failed project (I Grilli e le Cicale di Latina 2015). Iannuzzi registered again to the meetup and the organisers banned his profile from the group.

These cleavages unveil the parallelism of ideological and pragmatic reasons concerning the handling of power relations within the group.

After a number of meetings, the fracture could not be composed²⁴⁹ and a new meetup group was created²⁵⁰ by those discontented with the political position, organisation and atmosphere of the meetup group 256. Its name is '5 Star Latina in Movement' (*5 Stelle Latina in Movimento- 5SLIM*).²⁵¹

6.1.3 Top and bottom, communities and horizontality

The sociologist Roberto Biorcio recently edited a systematic study of the M5S that was carried out by a number of researchers in 16 Italian cities (Biorcio 2015a). He has an insightful understanding of the M5S that is particularly useful to analyse the implementation of its democratic idea in local communities. In an interview given for this research, Biorcio affirms:

Things move autonomously at the base - [activists] say that [...] they choose what things to do and what not to do - and, naturally, they read the blog and somehow stick to, or at least

²⁴⁹ Attempting to find an agreement, the group decided to deliberate on a 'pact for the community' (23 January 2015). The document was elaborated and amended in a plenary session that was highly participated in (by around 65 activists), a sign that the moment was extremely critical. After long confrontation, the dividing points concerned an amendment to include a clear statement of faithfulness to Grillo and Casaleggio within the document. The final voting took place at around 1 am, when about 40-50% of activists had already left the meeting. A thin majority voted against the amendment. After this vote, some of those that had been in favour of the amendment left the room announcing the rupture.

²⁵⁰ For more details about motivations and reasons of the conflicts between the groups see the press release justifying the creation of the new group (Redazione Latina24ore 2015) and the defence of meetup 256 by Bernardo Bassoli towards Fico and Di Battista, responsible for the meetup groups within the M5S directory (Bassoli 2014a).

²⁵¹ Two other meetup groups were created in Latina in 2015. On 25 January the group 'Friends of Beppe Grillo of Latina' (*Amici di Beppe Grillo di Latina*). The platform www.meetup.com registers 51 members of which 22 are also members of meetup 256 and 5SLIM and 15 are not from Latina or its province.

The total number of meetup meetings organised is 41 of which: 14 were participated by 1 person, 7 were merely informative posts (not meetings), out of 34 real meetings, 18 were virtual (forum discussion or online conference conversations) and 16 were physical meetings and coincide with events organised by others. Many meetings were attended by members that cancelled their participation to the group within few months, however since average attendance is of two members per meeting, these cancellations may correspond to just one or two members. All these data provide a picture of rather marginal and inconsistent group dynamics if compared to other meetup groups of the town. Besides the creation in January, the group started to operate in June when the ethnographic research (January-July 2015) was ending. The two most active and dynamic meetup groups of Latina (256 and 5SLIM) were already under analysis for the understanding of the M5S community of the town. For these reasons this meetup group was not included in the ethnographic research. The information above were collected and analysed on 28 October 2015 from www.meetup.com.

On 15 October another group was formed, 'Meetup Civic Activism Latina is ours' (*Meetup Activism Civico Latina è nostra*), on 28 October it had no meetings held and no activities carried out with only four members. This meetup group was not included in the ethnographic research.

follow the general directives of the centre. [A meetup] group can make its own blog [website and applications] and can organise its own activities, [... this is a] movement that has a substantially autonomous base, moving freely, making its initiatives. [...] Elements of unity [among different groups] can certainly be the fact of identity - being part of the same movement, [...] then share some values, some questions, or share criticism towards other parties. More complex is the discourse on national leadership, I believe that Grillo himself is pulling back a little, meaning that he leaves more space for MPs. [...] The elected begin to have some authority. [...] It is as if the lack of organization was partially compensated for by the role of elected representatives in the national institutions, but at times, including regional and local ones, which in some way may have a coordinating role and take the initiative. [...] The resistance of Grillo is instead to create organized structures, i.e., beyond or above. [...] In essence, every meetup group goes about its business, [...] some enjoy, that is, they manage it as they prefer, they have no constraints. [...] Some people say that maybe they would need town [coordinating] meetings, which occur usually when the deputies appear. So in this case, when there are the elected who make their report or return their mandate [...] in fact they act a bit as an "intermediate body" [corpo intermedio] (interview Roberto Biorcio).

Biorcio's analysis reflects a substantial trait of unicity of the M5S. On the one hand, the movement developed an internal informal structure where the leadership is able to control the political line through a group of elected representatives, trusted activists, the communication departments of the national and European parliaments²⁵² and the staff (Casaleggio Associati's) – as we will see below in more detail. On the other hand, the local groups are extremely free to organise their internal structure and to work independently from the central leadership. Horizontality applies to the local groups which are 'equally peripheral' from the central leadership, and sometimes equally ignored as there is no formal hierarchy.

In responding to a question concerning the risk that candidates may be elected just because they have support in their small local meetup group, Casaleggio affirms: 'our selection [of candidates] is made from the base, the base are members (of the blog), not the meetups' (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 Video #2 minute 29). With this answer, Casaleggio underlines that the certified membership to the M5S (which anyway does not grant the use of the logo) is given only by registering in the blog, not by participation in local meetup groups. The meetup groups are officially (but not *de facto*) independent from the movement.

²⁵² All national representatives accepted an agreement to delegate the management of the communication to Grillo and Casaleggio, it did not occur at the regional level as confirmed by Wilma (regional MP, interview). Leone (M5S MP, interview) explains that a number of people at the national level have been trained to approach media and to represent the M5S. Dora (M5S Euro MP, interview) argues that the communication team at the European level is strictly technical to facilitate the external communicative work of the Euro MPs, and recognises that at the level of the national parliament the work of communication is more complex because citizens need reference persons present in the media in the domestic context. The more relevant it is to build the identity of the movement.

Defining the M5S community gives rise to ambiguity, especially since February 2013 when the movement achieved national electoral success. The M5S has no local cluster that can permanently define and legitimate itself as a 'M5S group'. This was reasserted by Fico and Di Battista (responsible for local groups within the national directory) in the letter sent to all meetup communities in July 2015 (Fico and Di Battista 2015). The M5S rejects the structure of a party and objects to the creation of an organisational infrastructure, reasons why the meetup groups are not local clusters of the M5S.²⁵³ Fico and Di Battista wrote:

The meetup groups "Friends of Beppe Grillo" are laboratories for sharing ideas and values consistent with the contents of the blog of Beppe Grillo. The aim of the meetup groups is to create a culture of participation in public life. [...] They organise themselves according to the needs of participants and take the form that is most useful to the customs of the territory and of those who participate (Fico and Di Battista 2015).

In some cases of local conflict between meetup groups, Grillo did not permit the use of the M5S symbol to them in order to have force them to try to resolve these differences before they wish to run for elections.²⁵⁴ As a matter of fact, a political force which is internally divided is electorally weaker, and Grillo (and Casaleggio), Fico and Di Battista push the meetup groups of the same constituency to find a form of collaboration in view of the elections, and especially for local elections as in the case of Latina. They prefer to certify one inter-group list rather than to choose to certify one list among two or three available lists.

In order to guarantee to have an electoral list certified, and also to have more political force in the elections, the meetup groups of Latina saw the need to create an understanding among the conflicting meetup groups. This is the main reason why in June 2015, right after the fall of the mayor Di Giorgi, the two meetup groups started to cooperate.²⁵⁵ This experience shows that elections are both an element of unity and an element of division among the

²⁵³ As a rule Grillo allows to use of the M5S logo during electoral campaigns (a few months before the election day) to the lists of candidates certified for a specific election (generally coinciding with one or more meetup groups); the use of the logo is also permitted for the whole mandate to elected representatives.

²⁵⁴ Such as the neighbour town of Aprilia (Olanda 2013), Genoa (Sabatini 2015:80) and in the region of Sardinia (Melis 2014; Redazione Repubblica 2014). In some cases Grillo opted for the use of municipality primaries (*comunarie*) or the choice among different lists through the operating system (Carboni 2014a).

²⁵⁵ A joint meeting took place on June 23rd and the general opinion emerging from the audience was to work together in light of the elections, and there were contrasting interpretations concerning the steps to take in order to operationalise the co-work. On the one hand, some activists had reservations on the differences that still divided the two groups and the different form of internal organisation and work of the two. On the other hand, there were talks of merging the two groups.

meetup groups. *Elections may unite where participation divides.* The groups remained separated but the participation of activists in both groups increased and the initiatives on the ground became gradually participated in by both groups. However, the path of reconciliation was not smooth and during the months of September and October, confronted with decisions concerning the rules for the formation of the list of candidates and the electoral programme, the meetup groups faced a new moment of crisis that continued in 2016.²⁵⁶ With the turbulence caused by the reproaching and the new crisis, some activists switched back from 5SLIM to meetup 256, increasing the number of reasons that can maintain or can solve inter-group problems. In this case there is the reverse: *participation may unite where elections divide.*

6.1.4 Forms of organisation

Meeting participation in the two groups of Latina ranged from a handful of people to around 70 activists. Plenary meetings of the individual meetup groups, or joint meeting, were attended on average by 15 to 40 people with a rate of 2/3 being men and 1/3 being women. Accounting for around 700 total virtual members (those who registered in www.meetup.com, some are registered in both groups), implies that the percentage of participation in physical meetings reaches 10% of registered members for the occasions that are most participated in.²⁵⁷ Closer to the electoral time participation is higher, and from the rough data recalled by activists, participation reached 150 people in 2013,²⁵⁸ therefore rising to 20% of the membership.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ The divergences were due to the different constituencies they have, the meetup 256 has more members (on 2 November 2015, 538 compared with 188 of 5SLIM) and the 5SLIM has a bigger number of new members. This situation complicates the discussion concerning who can run as a candidate (how many months of activism, how many events and meetings should they have attended to be eligible etc.) and who can vote to choose candidates to the electoral list.

²⁵⁷ Being a new group, 5SLIM is an exception. Participation percentage was initially higher because it had only a few dozen members most of them actively engaged. However, the figures above were confirmed when the group membership grew.

²⁵⁸ An increase in participation around elections is common for the M5S, as noticed by De Nardis and Medici in Apulia region (2015 p. 153). The number of meetup groups created between November 2012 and March 2013 close to the national elections is also a confirmation of this tendency. The groups increased from 500 to 1102 in March (De Rosa 2013:133). In case of public events (i.e., conference, sit-in, artistic event, etc.) the number of participants depends on the place and the relevance of the topic and may reach a few hundred people, including activists, sympathizers and lay citizens.

²⁵⁹ The attendance registered in meetup.com accounts for participation in most of the meetings in the three months before and after the 24th-25th of February 2013 (regional and national election days). Exceptions

Both meetup groups of Latina requested the intervention of the MPs Fico and Di Battista (in representation of the national directory) to mediate the conflict, but they remained silent. On the one hand, this is the proof that the activists, at least in some circumstances, look for a structural form that allow them to transit through complex group conflicts.²⁶⁰ On the other hand, the lack of intervention of Fico and Di Battista confirms that the M5S values the democratic idea of horizontality at the grassroots. Even if confronted with the choice between imparting a vertical organisation (from the directory) in order to get organised and win elections or leave the group free to settle its own disputes with the risk of failing the electoral call, the M5S has regarded that the horizontality and grassroots democracy take priority over electoral success.

Meetup groups work differently and the lack of central control (i.e., by Grillo or the directory) on the forms and procedures adopted by each group favours the inhomogeneity of democratic practises.²⁶¹ The struggle against the political caste and the 'iron law of oligarchy' (Michels 1915) is undertaken by the meetup groups as a challenge from which different original democratic responses emerge (Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013:144). There are some differences and common tendencies between the meetup groups of Latina. I will analyse three features in order to understand the organisation of each group: regulations, 'agenda and moderation' and forms of making decisions.²⁶²

occurred on the 23rd of January when Grillo went to Latina for the electoral campaign (135 participants registered in meetup.com), the 8th of March, orientation and presentation meeting about meetup and M5S (100 participants registered in meetup-com) and the 5th of April, creation of thematic working tables (107 participants registered in meetup.com). The participation of a person to a meeting does not imply that the person announced her presence in meetup.com, therefore real participants may be slightly more than those announced. The organisers of meetup 256 (the only one active in these dates), check the presences and update the list with actual attendance. However, in the case of many people, among whom many are new faces, the accuracy of data may be questionable. For these reasons, it is plausible that roughly 150 people have attended a few meetings around election time, however this seems to be an exception rather than the rule. In the attendance.

²⁶⁰ Biorcio (interview; 2015c, 2015b:116), Capuzzi (2015) and Sampugnaro (2015:188–89) notice the emergence of a claim for organisation and structuration among some of the activists.

²⁶¹ The case of Rome and its many groups is probably the most varied (Quattromani 2015:131).

²⁶² This is the result of the analysis of the meetup regulations as well as of the participant observation in respective meetings.

Meetup group 256 regulations were renewed three times between 2010 and 2015.²⁶³ The first version was basic and asserted that it was inspired by the regulations of other meetup groups. Its first amendment in 2013 occurred four months after the victory of the national elections and was made with the experience of a growing group of activists and a bigger diversity than at the time the first version was created. In order to handle the growth of participation, the second version assigned more power to the staff of organisers and to the organiser in particular, and it increased the number of months of activism required to gain the right to vote and to candidate for organisers or to be nominated assistant or co-organiser. The intensification of staff power was the cause of the conflicts and eventually of the split of the group. It was reduced in the amendment of 2015 after the split occurred. Regulations provide that decisions are taken in the physical meetings²⁶⁴ by means of a majority vote, this is a general tendency that is also registered in Florence, Lecce and Bari (Biorcio 2015b, 2015c; Capria 2015; De Nardis and Medici 2015).

While the first articles of the meetup group 256's regulations are prohibitions (of offence, abuse etc.) it was only in 2015 that a preamble concerning the nature, scope and form of the group was added. The meetup group 5SLIM began instead with defining its identity and political trajectory. The regulations of 5SLIM (Meetup 5 Stelle Latina in Movimento 2015) are entitled 'Principles and Norms' (alternative to 'rules' or 'regulations') and it starts with the chapter 'Declaration of Principles and Values' asserting the identity of the 'community' and its affiliation to the M5S and Grillo.²⁶⁵ It eliminates the career of activists (making irrelevant the amount of meetings attended or months of activism) and refers to the harmony of the community which encourages decisions by consensus,²⁶⁶ however a different level of majority

²⁶³ Regulations are published in the meetup.com platform as approved in 2010 and amended in 2013 and, most importantly in 2015 after the meetup group split (Meetup I grilli e le cicale di Latina - MU 256 2010, 2013, 2015).

²⁶⁴ Online voting may be allowed in some specific cases if requested by activists that are unable to attend physical meetings.

²⁶⁵ Casaleggio is not mentioned in the document and this is curious because the vote contrary to the mention of Grillo 'and Casaleggio' in the pact for the community (23 January 2015) was the point of fracture that led to the split of the meetup group. Activists that had voted against the introduction of the mention of Grillo and Casaleggio, had reservations especially towards Casaleggio rather than Grillo. However, the two founders generally spoke with one voice and it is almost impossible to distinguish which message came from who.

²⁶⁶ Giacinto (M5S activist, interview) maintains that meetup group 256 was unable to create an atmosphere of reception, dialogue and pleasure in participation. The meetup group 5SLIM, since its inception,

is indicated in case a vote is necessary. The 5SLIM excludes from its membership those expelled by the M5S and those who manifest opposite opinions from the ideals of the movement. The renewal of the staff occurs every six months (as opposed to every twelve months in meetup 256). Finally, the document is more elaborated in terms of the procedures to guarantee the respect of the rules and creates an appeal body for that function. The regulation of the group 5SLIM encompasses a number of measures in response to the criticism directed at meetup group 256, it encloses an elaborated vision of participation which 5SLIM founding members considered undermined in the experience of meetup 256.

Besides public events, stalls and campaigns, the meetups operate through three kinds of meetings: thematic, regular and ad-hoc. Both meetup groups have thematic working groups that organise their activity independently from the plenary but are always open to all members. Working groups of the two meetup groups that are working on similar themes merged their meetings after the dialogue process of June 2015. In thematic meetings, the agenda is mandated either by the progress of the collective work or by the initiatives of influencers. The moderation is spontaneous because the number of participants is generally limited to between five and ten. Regular meetings are organised for the general purposes and general discussions within the group. The 5SLIM organises a weekly reunion that ends up with a collective dinner as a moment of conviviality. Regular meetings encompass ad-hoc themes if compatible with the priority list of each meeting. Ad-hoc or general meetings are organised with a specific aim that is beyond the thematic of any working group, and they discuss specific issues, projects, and ideas, as well as organise whole group events and make political decisions.

The two groups adopt two different kinds of moderation and forms of making decisions. Meetup group 256 nominates a moderator and a secretary at the beginning of each meeting, the secretary then produces a short summary of the meeting that is then published online. When the discussions become especially tense, the role of the moderator can come to be quite demanding and is rarely managed with diligence. The debates become unstructured with: constant breaks to restate the moderation rules, bidirectional dialogue, and mutual

declared that hedonism in participating was an objective of the group, as participation was not to be experienced as a duty but as a volunteer pleasure.

interruptions among participants. Additionally, the language turns increasingly aggressive and polarisation of opinions results, thereby highlighting the cut between inclusion and exclusion. However, the group is generally open to listen to those with strong opinions and often get convinced by them. In these cases, the voice of the influencers may assume control of the communication dynamic and dictate the timings, regardless of the presence of the moderator.

This situation happens more often in the meetup group 256 than in the meetup group 5SLIM. For instance, the influencer²⁶⁷ may intervene in a particularly chaotic moment, may make a (subjective) summary of the discussion and propose two or three options among which the group should choose through a majority vote. The group – in order to increase pragmatism and end the meeting by taking decisions through the rule of the majority – tends to accept this kind of interaction. This is a typical situation in which the group identifies (direct) democracy with the rule of the majority.

The group 5SLIM encourages extending deliberation and adopts decisions by consensus, thereby avoiding the need to vote. Meeting minutes are not taken and decisions are communicated informally via email by the organisers. Instead of voting, the discussion continues until the whole group is cohesive towards a decision. The role of influencers is more elusive because they may remain silent or intervene very punctually to direct the discussion back to the values of the group if needed. The meetings are declared auto-moderated because no moderator is nominated and all participants are encouraged to respect others while they are talking. This method results in a calmer and more convivial environment, because the pleasure of participation is identified as an objective of the meeting. However, influencers play the role of soft moderator, simply directing and prioritizing the floor for those who are less apt to intervene and raise their hands instead of directly entering in the debate. Auto-moderation fails when the debate becomes tense, and generally chaotic, as was seen in the meetings with meetup group 256. In such cases, the role of the influencer in moderating the meeting switches from soft to hard and achievements are similar to those of like situations with meetup group 256.

²⁶⁷ This term identifies those activists able to polarise and lead the discussion, be it in physical meetings or online. I will elaborate more on this below.

6.1.5 Democratic challenges within local groups

The experiences of activists at the local level reveal that the M5S provides a diversity of participatory practices. The democratic logic within a meetup group is not set by the ideals of the movement but oriented by them. The logic is set by the experience and actual interaction among activists. This dynamic is well summarised by Vasco (M5S activist):

People do not work like math or as propositional logic. If you take 100 people plus 100 people the total is not 200, it is not like that. This is because if one pulls to one side and the other pulls to the other side, they sum zero. If they both go in the same manner then the issue becomes like vibrational physics, so they can get into resonance and instead of totalling 200 they can become 2000. The issue is this: if you put two people in harmony, the elongation becomes endless, the potential becomes infinite. So people do not respond to classical physics, they respond to another type of physics (interview Vasco).

Vasco clarifies that the personal interaction within local groups is extremely influential in the quality of the democratic outcome of these groups. The question then is, if the representative democratic canon requires unity, does it also imply standardisation of practices and homogenisation? The existence of various meetup groups in the same town, especially those created because of a conflict among members of the same group, shows that one of the risks of the M5S is fragmentation and division. This is also a potential positive aspect which is diversity and richness of experiences. The movement stresses the importance of creating a democratic culture beyond the representative canon, increasing the diversification of practices. Is this a democratic problem? Fragmentation disregards political stability and increases suspicion for a creative political force that coagulates different democratic experiences.

Structuring the whole movement into local, regional, provincial, and national nodes would centralise control as well as homogenise its rich diversity. Grillo and Casaleggio were generally aware of these challenges and they faced them with openness to experimentalism, opting to remain neutral with local communities and excluding any possibility of their structuring. Although influence from above is constantly possible. As Biorcio (interview Roberto Biorcio) underlines, this independence of the base is a democratic richness of the movement. Bertoldo (M5S municipal representative) elaborates on this richness as well as the necessity of an organisation that is not structured:

It seems to me that we have begun to understand that we need an organisation... an organization that clearly does not become a structure. Because a structure brings the cons

that we know well and those are party structures. [...] The fact that we still do not understand how to organize ourselves well is something we wanted: to go against the system. When you go against the system, it means that you have to create something new. It will take time, the more we grow, the more we need to understand what it is. We call ourselves a movement precisely because we are in constant motion. [...] We always have to think and to work and to sort out local issues. Little by little, everything will happen spontaneously, with all the contradictions of the case, surely (interview Bertoldo).

Bertoldo highlights the distinction between structure and organisation and the richness and difficulty in substantiating the latter without following the attraction of the former. The ambiguity between autonomy and organisation challenges the movement at the base. On the one hand, the movement benefits from extended autonomy of organisation at the base that favours inclusion of practices and democratic experimentalism, on the other hand, this autonomy results in conflicts and in the emergence and strength of local leadership and sub-groups which tend to dominate the organisational forms adopted. Leadership at the local level tends to challenge the abstract horizontal participation and spontaneous organisation of the meetup groups but at the same time provides the groups with an identity and a political consistency.

Fermo (M5S activist) points out that the lack of methodological organisation for coordination and moderation is a weakness of the movement because major shortcomings become possible if the experimentalism is not oriented by democratic practices.²⁶⁸ Different methodologies are experimental and do not necessarily mean standardisation, for instance, different participatory forms of self-moderation could be in place and would pave the way to achieve more democratic dynamics, including the limitation of the role of influencers.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Fermo quotes the example of a debate within a working group on the environment, one of the activists proposed the idea of constructing a touristic port within Circeo national park. Fermo maintains that this idea is contrary to the environmentalist ideals of the M5S and with a democratic methodology, the debate would have highlighted the reasons of such contradiction stopping the initiative. However, the lack of democratic methodology and the bad moderator of that working group meeting not only did not stop the proposal but eventually brought it to voting where the votes against the idea won with a very little margin.

²⁶⁹ A democratic methodology for self-moderation was experimented during four creative workshops included in the ethnography; it is based on a floor-reservation by token managed through a first come first served stock. Activists participating in the creative workshop organised with the meetup 256 (27 March 2015), expressed appreciation for the methodology and argued that it could be experimented also in regular meetup meetings or in meetup working groups. The same method, although adapted, proved to be valid also in meetings with high attendance, such as the first meeting of 'Latina meetings' (17 July 2015) organised in the main square of the town and attended by around 50 people. On this occasion, it was set a speech time limit of 3 minutes controlled by a 'soft moderator' who also facilitated the passage of the microphone. During the two workshops organised at Sapienza University the same methodology enjoyed the esteem of the participating scholars (Cucchi, Gianolla, Albertini, et al. 2015; Cucchi, Gianolla, Bilancetti, et al. 2015).

This democratic experimentalism is possible because the meetup groups benefit from organisational independence, which, on the other hand, implies local conflicts. Conflicts often originate at the personal level. Biorcio (interview) emphasizes that personal ambition and narcissism are challenges experienced by the base of the M5S. Samuele (M5S regional representative) elucidates the main reason of conflicts to which Latina's case is no exception:

There are many conflicts in every region, in every province, I can only speak for Lazio. Conflicts are often linked to favouritism. That is, often in a group there are people who, whether due to their experience, their age, or perhaps for their traditional political past or for their approaches, they are like... ones are more extroverted than others... they emerge in these groups and form into strong subgroups that push others to a single political line. Here perhaps we lose a little bit of democratic meaning, we lose a little bit of the values of the movement. Often, from these meetup groups that have fossilised, they become customised on some central elements, but also there emerges alternative meetups that do not recognise the self-celebrated leadership. So, in many territories, there often emerges these rifts because of favouritism and for the inability to deal with different [political] lines that also exist in the movement itself. [In] historical groups instead, those with more experience, many different [political] lines are able to blend and go ahead on the same track. [...] It happens all the time to me [to mediate such conflicts] (interview Samuele).

The personal interaction component implies a different capacity to amalgamate the divergence on political perspectives, as the less acute the personal conflict, the greater the ability of the groups to find convergence on political differences. Anselmo affirms that in order to run for elections the meetup groups of Latina should be able to work together as a team, without favouritism or prejudices, at least temporarily, with the objective of creating a united list of candidates for elections.

Gender quota is another controversial point for the movement, as although the observed role of women in the meetup groups is substantial, their participation accounts for only just 1/3 of the participants. Regardless of their level of commitment, availability, and activism, the rate of women candidatures at regional elections confirms the relatively low attendance of women in the movement (Montesanti and Veltri 2015).²⁷⁰

The use of the internet, and especially social networks, increases the level of conflicts within the groups. The level of discontent in online discussions leads to: radicalise conflicting

²⁷⁰ This rate is confirmed at the national level, as for instance, only one woman has been nominated among the five directory members, one for the appeal committee and two out of twelve have been nominated among the area managers within Rousseau (version of the operating system). The next section will analyse in more detail these positions of responsibility. The M5S has similar proportions (from 1/6 to 1/3) of woman elected in the local and administrative elections 2014 (Biancalana and Regalia 2014).

positions, the use of offensive language, hasty judgement and personal attacks. During the harsh debates of January 2015, before the meetup group split, the reference to online controversy and mutual offenses was a reason for strong resentment and carried over into the physical meetings. The tendency to show disrespect emerges more easily in online interaction where people find a faceless shield in a screen and a keyboard. This tendency also became more usual during the ‘live’ interactions and physical meetings. Consequently, online interactions facilitate the degeneration of the inter-personal and inter-group relations.

6.2 Top-down: Origin, leadership and national structure

The M5S claims that it is not a party. It is an unstructured movement that opposes structuring and party logic for the creation of a political alternative against the oligarchic deviation they struggle against. Inquiry into the M5S structure helps one understand its response to the complex challenge of being within institutions to subvert them. It also tackles the issue of leadership within a movement that bases its political discourse on complete horizontality. How can a movement be completely horizontal, win elections and operate within institutions? Which kind of informal and formal structure sustains its horizontality? The following sections elaborate on how to: understand the model of leadership at the top of the movement, investigate the ramifications from the central leadership, comprehend the mechanisms of unofficial organisation of the movement, and analyse the method implemented to control and direct the movement in its whole.

6.2.1 *Co-leadership in the making*

The organisation of the M5S evolved over time and became more and more complex with the increase of electoral victories. The founders claim that the movement is organised horizontally and is leaderless (Fo et al. 2013:79), however, their own role has been central for the creation and the orientation of the movement. The non-statute and the (formal) registered statute – created to comply with institutional regulations – assigns to Grillo all formal powers with the property of the M5S symbol (Bassi 2013). Casaleggio was not a formal leader but he was officially one and defended the unstructured working relationship with Grillo, as he stated ‘there is no method, other than that of sharing ideas and make decisions when necessary’ (Casaleggio and Russo 2015). The ‘unstructured’ management has provided

very powerful results that are by themselves extremely interesting and therefore an investigation into the party's structure and power sharing is revealing.

Initially Casaleggio Associati²⁷¹ was a service provider for Grillo due to his blog, and likewise cooperated with the Italy of Values (IDV) party from 2006 to 2010. Although the IDV and the M5S were politically affine, Casaleggio would be in a conflict of interest by politically controlling two parties and indeed, at the beginning, he was by being in a business relation with them both. The first important electoral performance of the M5S coincided with the termination of the professional cooperation with the IDV (2010).²⁷² Casaleggio affirms that the IDV party 'probably wanted to stand on its own leg, from a certain point onward, both from the point of view of political addressing and communication' (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 video #2 minute 15). While Casaleggio requested a more prominent political role within the IDV he was actually closer to the one presented in Grillo's blog. His request therefore was not accepted by Di Pietro and produced the rupture (Fusani 2013). The M5S is the outcome of the opposite reaction by Grillo who incorporated the political influence of Casaleggio.

Oscar (former M5S senator, interview), confirms the evolution of the relationship between Grillo and Casaleggio and says that 'the legitimization of Casaleggio came, in my view, by the time Grillo got him on the stage before the political elections in San Giovanni [square, Rome, 22 February 2013], that was the time when this person who ran the blog became a co-

²⁷¹ A number of theories speculate about the supposed bigger interest moving Grillo, and mostly Casaleggio and his company. One argument refers to a conflict of interests of some companies that benefited of the public funds for the small and medium-sized enterprises made available by the cut of salaries of the M5S representatives, because these companies are represented also in the *Think Tank Group* by Confapri, participated by exponents of the M5S (Vanghetti 2014). Some speculate about the earnings from the advertisement of the blog (Dal Lago 2013; Mello 2013), however this argument was discharged in the media (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014; Malagutti 2013). Another argument refers to the fact that Casaleggio and his former associate Enrico Sassoon would make use of web marketing strategies for the benefit of a network of rich international corporations (Bruzzzone 2012; Carbonaro 2013:74–92; Di Salvo 2012; see for instance Orsatti 2010; Pucciarelli 2012); to keep the record clean Sassoon resigned from the Casaleggio Associati in September 2012 (Sassoon 2012). The critical literature rejects those conspiracy hypotheses (Ferri 2009; Mello 2013:54–60; Oggiano 2013:53–56). The same opinion is also widespread among M5S activists and representatives (both current and émigré) interviewed. Scholars (interview Fabio Bordignon) do not identify bigger interests behind Casaleggio, as Biorcio (interview) maintains that Casaleggio acted as a point of unity for the movement.

²⁷² In the regional elections of Piedmont, the M5S obtained a 4,1% share of the vote and was decisive for the victory of the North League candidacy. Roberto Cota (47,3%) won against the PD candidate Mercedes Bresso (46,9%) because many voters of the movement were former left-wing sympathizers. Encouraging results emerged also in Emilia Romagna (7%), Veneto (3,2%) and Lombardy (3%).

founder.²⁷³ The shift in type of relationship, from business to political, occurred at the presence of 800 thousand people, two days before the exploit at the national elections. This event had the symbolism of an official ceremony of investiture, and the political role of Casaleggio, not only as co-founder but also as co-leader, was out of question from then on.

The leadership style allowed of the dynamism of the relationship between Grillo and Casaleggio. Achille (M5S senator) asserts the kind leadership of the duo:

I can define them [Grillo and Casaleggio] as being charismatic leaders. A charismatic leader is not one who has authority, but is one who has authoritativeness due to their charisma. We are all grateful to them because the change of the institutions in our country comes mainly thanks to their effort and initiative. However, the fact that they are charismatic leaders, also allows them to say that when they take a position ... in our movement one counts for one, even Beppe is worth one, ...but obviously being a charismatic leader, he has a body of support – even in the joint assembly of the House and Senate - that is extraordinary. So it is difficult for a decision that is taken at the level of leadership to not be shared, however, it happens (interview Achille).

Achille highlights a double dynamic in the relation of the M5S representatives with the leadership. On the one hand, Grillo and Casaleggio are charismatic and thanks to their charisma, they generally draw the opinions of the M5S activists and representatives. On the other hand, Achille reclaims the freedom of opinion and decision within the party, which is certified by the cases of online polls in which the majority of the membership voted against Grillo-Casaleggio's opinion. The statement by Achille also reaffirms that Grillo is the top leader because he is the most extreme example that he quotes to reaffirm the motto of the party that 'each one is worth for one', not Casaleggio.

6.2.2 Staff, directory and internal structure

The role of Casaleggio Associati, its associates and its employee in directing the M5S is intriguing as all Casaleggio associates contributed to the project by Grillo in different forms (Carbonaro 2013:93–116). Before becoming an associate in May 2015, Maurizio Benzi collaborated with Casaleggio Associati (since 2004) and he was the founder of the first meetup in Milan in June 2005 – one month before the meetup network would be officially launched – a sort of laboratory for the platform.²⁷⁴ This also gives an idea of the synergy within Casaleggio

²⁷³ In May 2012 Casaleggio had publicly stated that 'in substance' he was the co-founder of the M5S with a letter to the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* (Casaleggio 2012).

²⁷⁴ Martino (interview) maintains that he was the founder of the meetup in Rome, the first 'spontaneous' meetup after the one created in Milan. Leone, more precisely states that the second meetup was

Associati, whose associates and workers are known as ‘the staff’.²⁷⁵ Casaleggio’s employees increased over time, going from half to one or a few dozen people (Malagutti 2013, interview Martino).²⁷⁶

The number and names of ‘the staff’ (including associates and employees) is unknown to most of the activists and representatives. The M5S representatives have never come into contact with them directly and address a general and anonymous email address to communicate with them (interview Oscar). The role of Casaleggio Associati’s staff in managing the M5S follows the same evolving logic occurred between Grillo and Casaleggio. Casaleggio company’s role within the M5S evolved from provision of information to suggestion of relevant topics, strategic communication plans, organisation of campaigns and events. With the creation and growth of the M5S it has covered some of the functions that belong to the executive committee of the movement and others that belong to the party central committee (Carbonaro 2013:134–36).

With the increasing demands of institutionalisation by a part of the constituency,²⁷⁷ and responding to the weak electoral results of November 2014 (Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2014b, 2014a), Grillo opened a poll in the blog to ask the membership to accept or reject his nomination of 5 people to share the ‘representativeness’ of the M5S with him. He stated: ‘[t]he M5S needs a representative structure that is broader than the current one. This is a fact. Me, the camper and the blog are no longer enough. I’m pretty tired, as Forrest Gump would say’ (Grillo 2014d). Grillo has not nominated a ‘directory’, however this is the

created in Genoa and then, on the same day, Rome and Salerno on 16 July 2005, however it is interesting to notice the emphasis emerging from the interviews on the spontaneity of the other meetup with respect to the first one of Milan.

²⁷⁵ Casaleggio affirms that the blog posts are drafted by Grillo, him and the ‘collaborators’ (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 Video #1 minute 41-42).

²⁷⁶ Federico Mello easily identified 15 people through their profile in the social network LinkedIn (Mello 2013:142–45), in September 2015 there are eleven members of LinkedIn that affirm to be current workers at Casaleggio Associati, apart from the Associates. Moreover, 26 LinkedIn members affirm that they worked at Casaleggio, among them Filippo Pittarello who become responsible for the Communication of the M5S group at the European Parliament.

²⁷⁷ An attempted structure was launched by Grillo and Casaleggio in 2011 but failed due to the harsh criticism of many activists which opposed the structuring (Caldarelli 2011; Carbonaro 2013:137–48; Oggiano 2013:218–22; Santoro 2012:95–98, 2014:102–5). After this attempt, Grillo stated: ‘There was no talk of any national coordinator, nor of political roles assigned to anyone. The M5S is not a party and cannot have any kind of vertical structures on the territory’ (Grillo 2011)

name arbitrarily assigned by the media (*direttorio* in Italian).²⁷⁸ Casaleggio explains that it “is an operational tool to tie the elected with the territory, not a “political” structure’ (Casaleggio 2015). He also explains why it was created and how it operates: ‘Grillo and I looked for operational support, on some issues, of five people who know well the Movement. Each of them has tasks in a specific sector [...]. We plan to increase over time the people who can provide operational support’ (*ibidem*).

The representatives in the directory are people trusted by Grillo and Casaleggio,²⁷⁹ who had been already cooperating with them, confirming that some representatives were already in close cooperation with Grillo and Casaleggio. Elda (M5S senator) and Samuele (M5S regional representative), confirm this and point out that people in the directory were those more visible in the media and those that could be totally trusted for the quality of their work and for the incarnation of the spirit of the M5S. Roberto Biorcio (interview) explains that the directory organises and mediates the movement and this is the role played to some extent by representatives more in general. He cites the example of Florence and Genoa where MPs and municipal councillors have played a fundamental role to glue the local community and solve conflicts (see also Capria 2015; Sabatini 2015). It also becomes clear that the structure put in place by Grillo and Casaleggio is a response to the challenge of fragmentation that was emerging within the movement. A month after the creation of the directory, Grillo nominated one of the three members of the appeal committee,²⁸⁰ to a role which was especially concerned with expulsions (Crimi, Lombardi, and Cancellieri 2015). This was another matter which raised criticism as we will see.

Casaleggio motivated the creation of the directory to improve the relation with the territory. Leone (M5S MP, interview) maintains that the directory acts as a filter between the

²⁷⁸ The criticism for the creation of the directory has been the root cause of the resignation of a number of MPs and Senators of the M5S (Borriello 2014; Buonfiglioli 2015; Cannatà 2014; Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2014a; Redazione La Repubblica 2014).

²⁷⁹ Alessandro Di Battista, Luigi Di Maio, Roberto Fico, Carla Ruocco and Carlo Sibilia, all MPs.

²⁸⁰ in order to comply with the internal regulations (Movimento 5 Stelle 2014) of the formal ‘Association M5S’ (established by Grillo under Italian law), Grillo needed to form the appeal committee (Grillo 2014g). He opened a poll for the membership to choose two of the five people he proposed: Roberta Lombardi, Giancarlo Cancellieri, Riccardo Nuti, Davide Bono and David Borrelli. Grillo directly nominated Vito Crimi while Roberta Lombardi and Giancarlo Cancellieri were elected through the poll; the three together have formed the appeal committee for five years.

163 elected officials and the central leadership. He maintains that ‘there is no structure. [... the directory] is simply a filter with the group to get more feedback and even faster’, he reads this as a participatory evolution and Elda (M5S senator, interview) argues that it is a necessity to share the workload by Grillo and Casaleggio. Samuele accepts the imposition of the directory as a transitory measure in view of an increased adoption of participation within the movement. This is a response to the tension between horizontality and leadership in the advanced phase of institutionalisation.²⁸¹ This political response implies that an internal directive structure is in place, regardless of the efforts to negate its relevance for a ‘leaderless’ movement.

Other coordinating roles have been assigned to twelve trusted representatives who act as area managers and they correspond to the various e-democracy functions implemented with the new platform Rousseau. Massimo Artini, expelled MP, explains that with the launch of Rousseau, Grillo and Casaleggio made an attempt to create a management structure of faithful people (Gangale 2015b; see also Munafò and Piana 2016). The role of the managers in charge of each area of Rousseau goes beyond the mere administration of the platform and includes a political directive role. Therefore, in the measure in which such structure will be operative it will constitute part of the movement structuralizing. Fabio Bordignon (interview) highlights the dual dimension introduced by the directory: on the one hand, it is a manifestation of pluralism of internal asset, on the other hand, Grillo and Casaleggio maintain the ultimate control and introduced people they trust into positions of responsibility.

6.2.3 *Trust and control*

The group of most trusted and close (informal) cadres in the M5S – those closest to Grillo, Casaleggio and the staff – total a few dozen people. This group closely cooperates with the M5S’ communication departments in the parliament, who are employed directly by

²⁸¹ The real role of the directory remained unclear for almost one year. Activists of the movement in their interviews did not see what the five members were doing. The prominence of the directory, become more evident also through the media coverage that resulted since December 2015 with the case of Camorra Connivance with Giovanni De Robbio, the M5S elected representative in the municipality of Quarto (small village in the province of Naples). In this occasion Fico, Di Maio and Di Battista represented the official voice of the M5S in a form that was unprecedented in terms of assertiveness and authority (Scanzi 2016).

Casaleggio.²⁸² This data and the data collected in interviews with the M5S representatives, reveal the informal structure and organisation of the M5S and that its key component is trust. The whole structure is built on a bidirectional trust: the bottom-up trust of the M5S membership (and voters) in Grillo (and Casaleggio) and the top-down trust of Casaleggio (and Grillo) in some representatives within the movement (who have been awarded specific responsibilities). Activists trust their leader (Grillo), and since he trusts Casaleggio, then the activists trust Casaleggio as well. Evidence on this regard is widespread at the grassroots level, as was seen in the interviews and in observing group activities and meetings. Publicly, Grillo has a very relaxed and blindly confident discourse towards and on Casaleggio.

How does the shift of trust translate into control? Jacopo, former M5S MP, explains in some detail the origins and developments of the system of trust and control within the movement. The long quote below provides a number of interesting elements:

Let us start from the assumption that since I entered into the Parliament I have never had roles and the possibility to enter the control room. That is, I had never had the occasion to be part of the directive board of the group at the parliament, even if at some point I had applied to be candidate [... I h]ave never been part of that niche of colleagues who were part of the directive board, nor of those who are elected every three months as leaders of the parliamentary group, nor between those who, at some point, began to come and go from Rome to Milan, who were people contacted directly by Casaleggio, I never had a chance to see with my own eyes, touching, what is the power of Casaleggio. I can only say that at some point emerged a small group in the parliamentary group, who were a bit more “influencers”, personalities. The most influencer of all is Alessandro Di Battista who is a person who can... have a strong influence over much of the group and when he speaks in a meeting one can feel he is ascendant. One can see that he manages to persuade, to convey a little bit the views of the group.

There was a group of these people who began to go back and forth [to Milan] to share or to receive instructions from Casaleggio, political instructions [...] [A part of them became the directory] but they were a bit more, a dozen people, also more at times. [...] It is not that we had the opportunity to decide something, in the end the blog decided, they decided what they wanted to talk about and talked only with some and not with others. [...]

I can say with some conviction that in the high points of Italian politics, when there was a government crisis, or at the beginning [after the elections of February 2013] when the government had to be constituted, or even when there was a crisis in the two governments

²⁸² Alagia (2014) counts 40 MPs and ten senators. A few months after the publication of Alagia’s article, most of the names mentioned found places in the directory, the appeals committee and as area managers in Rousseau. Speculations concerning the M5S organisation emerged on the website ‘Grillo-leaks.com’, promptly denounced and obscured by postal police because it published private information of the people involved. Grillo-leaks attempted an organizational chart of the M5S with Grillo and Casaleggio at the top, followed by Davide Casaleggio and Casaleggio Associati on the same level. Below them the directory then the appeals committee followed by a few MPs and Senators (Cuzzocrea 2015; Rame 2015; Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2015a; Salvatori 2015; Serafini 2015).

of Letta, in the reshuffle and then in Renzi's government, [...] there's always been a very clear closure and that was decided by Milan and not by parliamentarians. Probably Casaleggio, or a consultation between Casaleggio and his collaborators, Grillo, I do not know. [...] So there was never a real possibility of us, parliamentarians to collaborate – but more than “us” parliamentarians, actually the confrontation and decision had to be taken on the web with the subscribers to the M5S, which would have been the best choice. [...] In fact, there had been a total closure, but the total closure was not decided either by the parliamentarians or by the citizens on the web, it was decided by Casaleggio. That is where the influence was strong.

Whenever there was a chance to talk with Grillo or Casaleggio and bring the point up, etc., we were always basically cheated. I participated in a number of meetings, though not many, when Grillo came to Rome, where it was possible to make the fateful questions “... democracy from below ...the platform to participate and decide together ...who decides the program for the European elections?” and Grillo said: “we would decide together on the web.” Has anyone seen the program for the European elections? There were those seven points, I think, all decided from Milan. [...] This is the issue, it was not that Casaleggio called you and told you... Nobody called me because I was irrelevant. [...]

In fundamental [parliamentary] committees, such as constitutional affairs where the electoral law is decided, etc., there were all the people that were close to Casaleggio. There was never a chance to place a person in a strategic committee. [...] The members [of the committees] were actually ... I do not think they were chosen by Casaleggio directly, however, it was a dynamic – I do not know how natural [...]

All the work that was done in committees, when it was an important task that involved the group and involves the country politically, it should still be discussed in the parliamentary assembly. The problem is that at some point, [the M5S groups within each committee] had become bodies that alone [...] decided on their own the political position, without involving the assembly. [...] If an issue such as the electoral law of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs was dealt with by mainly three out of seven or eight people who were members of the Committee, those three people decided for 150 MPs and decided for 20-30-50 thousand members of the M5S, and for 8,5 million [voters]... So, in fact a very strong power has been granted to these three or four spokespersons – or even to all seven or eight of the Committee – to influence and decide the political position. And where there has been a problem – like the crime of illegal immigration [...] – it was created because the blog at one point went sideways [with respect to the parliamentarian's decision] and said “stop here on this thing”, and so they did a post which was in contradiction to the political position of the parliamentarians. [...]

My personal experience... I had a problem - and since I have a strong propensity to participatory democracy - I had a political position to be taken up within the committee [...], there was not a linear position of [the M5S] committee members. Therefore, I did as suggested and went to the communication [department ...] I asked the courtesy to contact the staff and ask if it was possible to make a vote on the portal to choose on this [policy] position. I did not ask this alone, the committee asked this. We agreed with the leader of the parliamentary group [...] we went to the communication department and asked this. After a couple of days we got the answer that Casaleggio did not believe that these questions could be put on the blog ... [that this question] could be put to the vote. Therefore, it was not possible to do this (interview Jacopo).

There are a number of aspects that emerge from these experiences and observations by Jacopo that are interesting to analyse: 1) A group of a dozen people was created over time to connect Milan to Rome, that is, Casaleggio Associati with the parliament (Genoa and Grillo

are not even mentioned here); 2) These people become more ‘influencer’ than the rest of the group and could direct the group’s opinion; 3) Key political decisions are taken from ‘Milan’;²⁸³ 4) Casaleggio was the main political leader at national level; 5) No participatory procedures were created to enable the membership of the M5S make important political decisions at the national level and to make them with participatory methodology; 6) Other parliamentarians (outside the group of those selected by Grillo and Casaleggio) had little possibility to talk to them and influence their decisions; 7) The spokespersons trusted by Casaleggio are sitting in important parliamentary committees, where key political decisions are being taken and where the political potential of the movement is more tested. This implies that for Casaleggio to control important political decisions it was just a matter of being in contact with (and having control of) the representative of the respective committee;²⁸⁴ 8) The political decisions within the parliamentary committee do not involve forms of extended participation beyond the members of the committee, while also the sub group of representatives dealing with a specific issue within the committee may decide for the whole group and for the whole of the M5S; 9) The blog can exercise veto power on decisions taken by representatives, but the online vote has also been able to oppose the blog’s veto (i.e., crime of illegal immigration). 10) If the M5S members of a parliamentary committee want to use the most participatory tool available in the M5S (the blog and its operating system) to take a political decision through participatory procedures, the leadership in Milan can forbid such a participatory attitude; 11) The political position of the movement in parliamentary committees that are considered less relevant is left to the representatives in those committees; 12) The communication department is the lieutenant of the leadership in the institutions and is used by representatives to contact the leadership.

²⁸³ Irene, M5S activist and former parliamentary assistant of a M5S senator, argues that political issues with a strong media impact are closely controlled by the leadership, while looser control is dedicated to other issues.

²⁸⁴ Among the 21 M5S representatives that have been nominated in the organisational structure (those in the first attempt to assign national competences in 2011, the directory, the appeal committee, and the area managers within Rousseau), there are 14 MPs and Senators (Bonafede, Catalfo, Crimi, Di Battista, Di Maio, Di Stefano, Fico, Lombardi, Morra, Nuti, Ruocco, Sibilia, Taverna, Toninelli), two Regional MPs (Bono, Cancelleri), four Municipal Councillors (Bertola, Bugani, Olivieri, Piazza) and one Euro MP (Borrelli). The Euro MP is vice president of the EFDD group of the EU Parliament.

The method to control the movement within national institutions is clear enough: the leadership decides which committees are to be controlled directly and assign people they trust to sit on them. As for the other committees, the representatives are left with their hands free to make decisions, however, when decisions are not compliant with what the leadership desires, the decision may be taken collectively through a vote online which generally confirms the opinion of the leadership. But there are exceptions such as the case of the crime of illegal immigration. The communication department connects and controls the group of representatives within the leadership, a role shared by the directory and other ‘influencers’ operating as filters (refer to interview with Leone cited above). Oscar mentions a conversation with Casaleggio in which he was elucidated to the strategy of managing the M5S as a business company:

I had contact with Casaleggio who gave me his version of the movement, which is very far away from mine. [...] Very calmly, he said that he sees the movement as a company. He told me that basically he needed employees and that these five persons [the directory] should be his employees among the parliamentarians. I make this very short, it was an hour long conversation and maybe I summarize here a little too much. However, he has a vision that from his point of view, and it is also honest in the sense that he has not told me stupid things or lied to me, he believes that we will come to have 51% of the vote, however, he needs 40 people because the “product movement” needs to advertise more. Well, this is a company-oriented version of the movement and for me it has an ideological equivalence. [...] The goal is to rule: “we will govern”. What then did Grillo say to me, “we will govern, we will get to govern” (interview Oscar).

Oscar’s interview describes the reason for the creation of this informal structure, its logic from the point of view of Casaleggio. Under this perspective in order to win a majority of consensus the party need to be cohesive, work as a company, be advertised as a great political product and this all needs a strong and thin organisation (trusted representatives and communication departments), centralised as in business enterprises. In the conclusion this point is returned to, with respect to where political organisation and market logic are glued together.

Grillo and Casaleggio have moderated or dismissed spontaneous structures that have emerged within the party. An example is the meetup group 878 that was not a territorial group but a transversal organisation defending the core values of the M5S.²⁸⁵ For example, they

²⁸⁵ It gathered around 600 members from all-over Italy and included some of those who are now part of the ‘trusted’ group: Taverna, Ruocco and Di Battista.

intervened to settle disputes among different groups of the same city. One of the members, Martino (M5S activist, interview) affirms '[t]here was a relation of trust, so if something happens or happened that could go against the principles that were the origin of the movement on the web, we said it on the web'. In December 2014, right after the creation of the directory, the organisers of meetup 878 were forbidden the use of the logo and, in practice, the group was dissolved. The Meetup group 878 was *de facto* a competing internal (and independent) regulatory entity claiming for itself the right to control the compliance of the representatives and local communities with the original values of the M5S. This group was tolerated, or even accepted in the initial phase, but it was dismissed as soon as the central leadership structured its own organisation.

6.2.4 Strong methods: expulsions

Before the M5S became so successful at the national level, expulsions were used to maintain the orthodoxy of values and the movement united around the respect for the shared values. Three cases became renowned in the Emilia Romagna region. These are the Valentino Tavolazzi (Carbonaro 2013:210–35; Mello 2013:247–48; Santoro 2012:119–26, 2014:123–27), Giovanni Favia (Carbonaro 2013:288–94; Mello 2013:258–60) and Federica Salsi (Carbonaro 2013:295–301; Mello 2013:159). Tavolazzi was dismissed for organizing a meeting to discuss internal democracy, Favia was dismissed as he was betrayed by an off-record comment that was mainstreamed on Italian TV when he burst out in an attack against the central power of Grillo and Casaleggio, and Salsi for taking part in a talk show against the rule of the M5S. As dissidents, they are forbidden the right to use the symbol of the M5S (which is Grillo's property).

The combined expulsion of the MPs Artini and Pinna (Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2014b) were the last ones before the leadership decided to create the appeal committee (which, however, plays a role only after the expulsion has taken place and if the expelled appeal). After about half of the legislature (December 2015), 37 MPs have been expelled or have decided to leave the M5S parliamentary group, 18 deputy's House of Deputies and 19 Senators, for a total of 126 M5S MPs remaining (Camera dei Deputati 2015; Senato della Repubblica 2015).

The opinion of the M5S community concerning the use of expulsions is generally critical. Only in a few cases, there is a sort of consensus in the M5S membership, such as with the first senator expelled by the M5S group, Marino Mastrangeli. He gathered consensual opposition within the movement for his obstinacy in participating in TV shows against the opinion of the parliamentary group and of the code of conduct of the same group (Grillo 2013g; Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2013a; Salvatori 2013). Zeno (M5S activist, interview), boldly faithful to Grillo and Casaleggio, confirms that some expulsions are due to political reasons, although not openly assumed to be. For example, Artini was officially expelled for the lack of accounts concerning the restitution of his salary, but unofficially because he had tried to implement an internal independent communicative structure. Expulsions are direct actions of the leadership to keep the movement cohesive. When a confirmation vote is requested from the activists, they are never opposed to the expulsion, thereby strengthening the union within the movement.²⁸⁶ Leone maintains that the parliamentary group takes decisions by majority rule and some of the expelled MPs are those who did not accept the group decisions and leaked details about the group discussion betraying the group's unity.

The membership justifies the expulsion as a transitory measure (Zeno), as they are necessary losses of the 'struggle' promoted by the M5S to renovate politics (Romeo). Activists maintain that problems should be solved in-house and taken advantage of in that way to improve the movement, not by denouncing them publicly in the press (Giacinto) and possibly diminishing the movement. However, the very method of excluding dissenting voices generates discontent and reduces participatory entrepreneurship in structural matters. Activists are aware that they are free to act in their territory but not within the party structure.

6.2.5 *Soft method: Influence and communication*

Many of the M5S representatives interviewed say that they have not received any kind of interference from Grillo and Casaleggio concerning their work as representatives. This has been confirmed in interviews at all levels where the M5S spokespersons are present: municipal (Bertoldo), regional (Samuele, Wilma), chamber of deputies (Leone), senate (Achille, Domenico, Oscar) and European parliament (Dora). Likewise, the perception of most

²⁸⁶ The ratification of the expulsions takes place through online voting, I will analyse below the implication of e-democracy and the way it is adopted within the movement.

of the activists interviewed is that the representatives are mostly independent from Grillo and Casaleggio in their political work (Folco, Martino, Romeo, Vasco, Anselmo). Activists also reassert that there is no influence at the local level, where each community can organise its activity independently (Carmen, Folco, Giacinto, Tullio, Anselmo).²⁸⁷

If, to a large extent, the leadership does not intervene in the movement's activities, how does it control them and keep them united?

The literature is well aware of the fact that web projects and initiatives are generally carried out by a meritocratic or charismatic leadership that emerge among initial horizontal relations (Miconi 2014). The role of the 'influencers' is not assigned, rather, those people emerge in a community and have the ability to direct the interests, work or political intentions of the fellows. Gianroberto Casaleggio has described the role of influencers for online communities in a short article in 2008:

90% of online content, articles, comments, videos, pictures, of every social media, is created by 10% of the users. These people have the ability to influence the online community and address the choice of a nappy or the election of the president of the United States, as indeed it is happening. [...] The influencers are the key to communicate with the web. [...]

Influencers can determine the success of a product or service. [...]

The opinion is not a commodity for sale, influencers must then be properly informed, listened to, provided with comparative tools of their product or service. The most important investment is the quality of relations with influencers (Casaleggio 2008).

Casaleggio, as a network specialist, was well aware of the fact that the control of virtual groups goes through the influencers. The question is, how does it translate in the hybrid entity which is the M5S having local clusters and a group of elected representatives at all administrative levels? Influence is not pure power, '[e]ven the closely related concepts of

²⁸⁷ Carmen (M5S activist) recalls only one case of interference by the leadership at the municipal level in Rome in 2013, when Democratic Party (PD) mayor Marino asked to the four elected representatives of the M5S to provide a name and a CV for one person to join the city government. The representatives wanted to put forward an online poll but Grillo responded sharply that this was against the rules of the M5S as it does not make political alliances, neither subtle ones (Grillo 2013d; Redazione Corriere della Sera 2013a; Redazione Repubblica 2013b). A similar case took place in 2015 with the PD newly elected governor Emiliano of Apulia region, this time the orientation of the M5S representatives was already very clear and the 3 seats offered were rejected without hesitation (Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2015d).

power and interpersonal influence are not identical' (Merton 1968:473).²⁸⁸ In the M5S, influence is diffused and power is centred in the national leadership of Grillo and Casaleggio.

The M5S's non-statute (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009a) reads that '[t]he "Office" of the 5 Star Movement coincides with the web address www.beppegrillo.it'. The blog (and Casaleggio Associati who manages it) corresponded to the central office until the movement entered into the national parliament. Since February 2013, there were 163 M5S MPs working in the same place and the monopoly of the virtual office was disputed by this new and extended M5S working space (which also includes the collaborators and therefore roughly 500 people working within it). Different than the virtual office of the blog, the office of Rome was populated by activists (representatives and their assistants) and the leadership had to make sure to maintain control over it through the communication department. The communication stream could not merely proceed from the blog as it had happened before.

Claudio Messori, was in charge of the communication at the national parliament, then moved to the European parliament and was eventually dismissed. Martino and Nadia (interview) explain that this is due to the authoritarian measures adopted by Messori who, besides being very competent, wanted to decide the themes and speakers according to criteria of visibility in the media. This way of using marketing to manage communication created discontent. Dora maintains that there was a lack of trust in the European Parliament,

²⁸⁸ Merton study does not apply to large constituencies nor to the political sphere, but the insight on interpersonal influence help outline some interesting dynamic within the M5S, both at the national virtual level and at the local virtual and physical level. Merton describe the difference between parochial and cosmopolitan influencers, the former linked to the concept of *Gemeinschaft* and the latter to the concept of *Gesellschaft* (Merton 1968:447–48). Web influencers unite the two being part of the 'world' wide web, but referring to a closed community within it. The influencer on the internet is potentially scalable to more *Gemeinschaften* pertaining to the overall *Gesellschaft* of the web. A web influencer is always parochial because she leads opinion through the erection of a virtual inter-personal network of contacts, but she is also cosmopolitan because her interaction is basically directed to the wider web. Merton maintains that a cosmopolitan influencer resides in her community but lives in the greater society. The social reputation of an online influencer is built through skills and knowledge (typical of cosmopolitans) and through personal influence through exchange of personal views (typical of parochials).

Merton identifies the 'secondary tendency for people to be otherwise most influenced by their peers in that structure' (Merton 1968:465). After dividing into three the levels of influence, Merton maintains that middle influencers may be more influential to their peers than top influencers may be and so on. This partition is present at the level of meetup groups but the internet tends to centralise influence. While Merton gave the image of a more compact 'chain of influence', the web provides a more centralised form of influence. He further elaborates on the singularity (monomorphism) and plurality (polymorphism) of the (thematic) spheres of influence identifying 'locals [parochial] are the more likely to be polymorphic and the cosmopolitans, monomorphic' (Merton 1968:468).

both from the Euro MPs and from Casaleggio towards Messori.²⁸⁹ Oscar (interview) affirms that Messori was less controllable than others such as Rocco Casalino (currently responsible of the communication at the Senate) and concludes: ‘both [Casalino and Loquenzi] have the role of watchdogs.’ These dynamics highlight the necessary alignment of the communication departments to the central leadership.

Manuel Anselmi (interview) emphasises that the leadership of Grillo and Casaleggio is paternalistic, as they are the political impertinent ‘fathers’ that confront all other political fathers (party leaders) with irony and knowledge, while activists are considered and referred to as ‘boys’ (and girls) even if some of them are 50 years old and beyond. Grillo’s boys are initially read as reactionaries and unable to bring about real change. Anselmi did not acknowledge that while we study these transitional political phenomena their reputation develops in a form that also Grillo’s boys are demonstrating to be responsible and able to gather ‘mature’ political support. Federico Carbognani (Cucchi, Gianolla, Albertini, et al. 2015) outlines a strategic reason for communication paternalism within the M5S, and says Grillo aims at polarising the criticism coming from the media and political adversaries on his own person. Throughout his career Grillo matured a great experience in dismissing criticism and even turning it in his favour and using it to his advantage. Therefore he acts as the shield of the M5S.²⁹⁰ In his public discourse Grillo uses satire and paradox in order to build political arguments that he is always able to negate as mere jokes, which is something what happens when he makes mistakes (Mello 2013:54–60).²⁹¹ This discursive defence mechanism is a

²⁸⁹ This is not the only case in which the parliamentary group wanted to expel the communication officer, it happened a few months later with Ilaria Loquenzi, the parliamentary group had passed a vote of no confidence but this time Casaleggio intervened to protect Loquenzi with the result of having her confirmed (Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2015c, 2015b). The allegation of some of the MPs against Loquenzi were the same as those of the Euro MPs against Messori: she centralised too much the media attention around some, more appealing, faces and themes. However, it is possible that Casaleggio may have felt his own controlling position questioned by the rising authoritarian attitude of Messori, while Loquenzi was under his control.

²⁹⁰ This function of Grillo was very evident during the raise of the movement and it is fading out with the emergence of other media figures representing the movement, such as the five members of the directory.

²⁹¹ Grillo’s leadership has been compared with that of French comedian Coluche, whose political manifesto had been published on Charlie Hebdo and asking the support of the marginalised social sectors (Biorcio and Natale 2013:16–20; Turner 2013a:192–93). Coluche as well had a left wing orientation but tried to seduce all voters, both emerged in a moment of distrust for the political elite, offered an anti-establishment approach and a focus on honesty and anti-corruption. Natale and Biorcio underline that the comedian can use his working language to overcome formalities and social norms to elaborate immediately on popular culture, reaching out deeply among common people.

political instrument used by the leaders of the new political movement. Anselmi (interview) recalls the description of histrionic leader, made by Lynda Dematteo (2011) for Umberto Bossi, to describe how the use of jokes by Grillo legitimates ambivalences and contradictory positions.

While in public, Grillo represents the movement with his unique rhetoric, within the movement, Casaleggio managed internal communication reducing speculation gossiping (a dividing problem at the local level) and controversy. He also demanded that discussions adopt a very essential top-down discourse. Examples include the very sucking post to open polls or similarly succinct texts used to communicate to the list of candidates for the local elections of 2016 and to inform activists of various meetup-groups, including the groups of Latina (e.g., to say that their list would not be certified) (Grillo 2016a).²⁹² This form of top-down decision making and communication, dissatisfies many activists who have no form of changing the way it is done. Its essentialism is extremely pragmatic and creates a silent moral discourse within the movement, where the boys (activists) have to satisfy the criteria of the fathers (Grillo and Casaleggio) if they want to be recognised. This lesson that was given to Latina and to other non-certified cities will serve as admonition for other meetup groups of the same town that are in conflict among themselves and also where the M5S elected representatives deserted the movement.

6.3 The M5S' e-democracy controversies and effectiveness

This section is particularly substantiated by critical literature besides ethnographic evidence²⁹³ used in order to explore some theoretical controversies on e-democracy, make a panoramic picture of the e-democracy landscape of the M5S, explore the main criticism of its use and elaborate on the main strategy and implications of the M5S e-democracy. The

²⁹² One line of the post affirms: '[t]he 5 Star Movement will not run [for elections] in Caserta, Latina, Ravenna, Rimini and Salerno', no explanation are given to activists for this decision which comes after two months of silence from the leadership, besides a post of ten days earlier where they informed that from then on they would not accept other request of certification, by electoral lists of candidates (Grillo 2016c).

²⁹³ The following pages benefit from the revision of the critical literature (Biancalana 2014; Carbonaro 2013; Dal Lago 2013; De Rosa 2013; Federici et al. 2015; Mello 2013; Miconi 2014; Mosca 2015; Natale and Ballatore 2014; Sæbø, Braccini, and Federici 2015), including critical activists within the movement such as Federico Pistono (Carboni 2014b; Pistono 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013d, 2013c, 2013b, 2014a, 2014c, 2014b), and data collected during the ethnography including participatory observation, interviews and the analysis of the M5S documents.

following sections explore: some of the controversies of e-democracy, its challenges and perspectives, the structure of the M5S e-democracy and its components, highlight a number of elements of criticism emerging from the M5S e-democracy and elaborate on the innovations brought by the M5S in the field.

6.3.1 Theoretical controversy on e-democracy

The utopian paradigm of the M5S discourse is to change the representative democratic canon into a direct (participatory) democracy through ICT (Information and Communication Technology): ‘introducing direct democracy we do not need parties any longer: on an egalitarian bases you decide anything, both at the local and national level’ (Casaleggio in Fo et al. 2013:191). As Rousseau’s ‘social contract’ clarifies, the main obstacle for direct democracy is the extension of the polity. The M5S advocates that the Internet can provide a way to overcome this limit and make direct democracy possible, even for big constituencies. The M5S strives towards this possibility and envisages the indefinite expansion of the web and the leadership maintains that the ‘Internet will absorb any modality of communication and will mould it. Internet is the supermedia. Online elections will become the normality’ (Casaleggio in Fo et al. 2013:28). Critics argue that the equation of internet with unrestricted freedom and expansion of democracy is demagogic and manipulative.²⁹⁴ Obviously, the M5S’s political agenda, as the agenda of the Pirate Party for instance, includes the diffusion and expansion of the use of the web to increase participation in the political sphere.²⁹⁵ However, it is misleading to assume that *ipso facto* the point of the agenda is achieved through the implementation of e-democracy by the movement. The M5S advocates

²⁹⁴ Morozov calls ‘cyber-utopianism’ an extremely unbalanced and positive confidence on internet and its redemptive perspective. This is a demagogic use of the concept of internet because ‘most cyber-utopians stuck to a populist account of how technology empowers the people, who, oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel, mobilizing themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever new tool comes along next year’ (Morozov 2011:xiv). Questioning the emancipatory potential of the internet includes the political sphere of both, authoritarian and democratic regimes and it is unclear ‘how far online organizing and digital communities will be allowed to push states toward drastic political change and greater democratization’ (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010). From the perspective of the civil society in a democratic state, these alerts should burst a wise and aware/responsible use of the internet, avoiding the passiveness that leads to manipulation by gatekeepers; this is what Morozov names cyber-realism. Not a dismantling of internet-based democratic projects, but a non-naïve approach to the internet that is not the revolution in its own right, and which use can lead to emancipation as well as censure.

²⁹⁵ The M5S programme (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009b) elaborates on the diffusion of the internet and its access and introduction in the educational system and does not foresee direct actions to enhance the adoption of e-democracy.

a cultural revolution in this direction, which is a long process because the response of people is not homogeneous nor synchronous. However, the critics stress that the current use of e-democracy by the M5S includes leadership manipulation and authoritarianism.

The discourse on and criticism of the M5S e-democracy intertwines novelty with innovation. On the one hand, not all that is new is necessary innovative, on the other hand, it has such potential.²⁹⁶ If, on the one hand, the adoption of ICT to increase participation is unprecedented, then, on the other hand, it would be myopia to see in ICT alone (or mainly on it) the success of the M5S and its democratic innovation, as this would, for instance, disregard the fundamental role of the local groups working at the grassroots. Overstating the role of ICT confuses the political sphere with the ICT-technical spheres. The object (sphere of politics) linked with the method or the instruments used within the object to facilitate political action (the web and its application).

Tibusi and Bilancetti (Cucchi, Gianolla, Bilancetti, et al. 2015) explain that the web is not an element of openness *per se*, as it does not eliminate the interaction among people and the social and political dynamics and hierarchies therein. Democratic innovation has to enter the novelty of the web and make sure that the authoritarian logics are not replicated. Among the first questions raised is the neutralisation of intermediaries, i.e., how far is e-democracy going? What is the role of gatekeepers to regulate, restrict or manipulate online interactions?²⁹⁷

Once entered within the internet spheres, it is possible to realise that it is not a space of horizontality. Among others, Tibusi (Cucchi, Gianolla, Bilancetti, et al. 2015) stresses that

²⁹⁶ Morozov maintains that it is suspicious to justify a political movement's politics based on the argument that the movement is the 'party of the web' and therefore applying dynamics still uncovered by traditional parties (Morozov and Menichini 2013).

²⁹⁷ The elimination of party structures and the justification of absence of internal hierarchy is maintained by the M5S leadership through the discourse that the people – when directly connected – do not need intermediation. However, this argument hides the centralism of the leadership and the presence of transitional coordinating figures informally entrusted by the leadership (i.e., the directory or the area managers within Rousseau). Critics observe that the blog and its connected sites are built to sell political ideas mixed with commercial products and life styles (Dal Lago 2013), and that the discourse of Grillo provides the illusion that the use of the internet eliminates political intermediation (Mello 2013:64–68). Santoro argues that Grillo's narrative framework, informative stream and political views, constitute an embracing identity sphere which involves the membership and make it a true informative and interactive sphere compared with the manipulated information of traditional media (Santoro 2012:61–67, 2014:72–78). The collective action and collective decision making may be manipulated by those who generate and manage online processes (interview Raffaele De Mucci).

the web preserves social difference, unbalance of skills, knowledge and experience. These do not disappear on the web and therefore those able to prevail can use the internet as a space of prevarication towards weaker counterparts. It is a matter of personal capacity, skills, availability of time and resources as well as social constraints.²⁹⁸ Basilio (M5S municipal representative, interview) argues that total direct democracy is not practicable, as within it exists the risk of having everyone voting on everything and people would just click on one option without being informed.²⁹⁹ He maintains that a check on the level of information possessed by the e-voter on the issue at stake could be desirable.³⁰⁰ In addition, since involving people in participatory practices is a complex matter it should be better dealt with via a combination of online and in-presence forms. Indeed, this is what happens in local groups studied here, as confirmed by Biorcio's (interview) and my ethnographic evidence, groups generally make a decision in their live meetings and use the e-democracy instruments to get organised. As a result, the potential and limits of e-democracy is all but finally defined, as it has potential but faces a long and challenging path ahead.

6.3.2 *E-democracy panorama of the M5S*

The use of the internet within the M5S has been evolving since the beginning, starting both at the macro and micro levels. For the first 6 months of 2005, members could barely comment posts on Grillo's blog, but with the launch of meetup.com they engaged in local communities both virtually and physically, as each local group created one or more meetup groups. Blog posts are generally drafted by Casaleggio's staff and approved by Grillo. Grillo and Casaleggio used to talk on the phone on average 5 to 7 times a day and they would also

²⁹⁸ Manin takes the M5S as a case to open a debate on the role of the use of internet and social networks in fractioning the communicative and informative environment and divide the 'audience' in many sectorial audiences (Manin 2014). Likewise, Papacharissi (2009) argues that Habermas' metaphor of the public sphere is not applicable to the internet where it is replaced by public spaces dominated by private protagonists. Diamanti (2014a), evolving and merging the concepts of Manin (1997) and Crouch (2004), argues that the M5S is the champion of the 'post-"audience democracy"'.

²⁹⁹ This use of the internet is for Folco an 'ochlocracy' or 'government of the mob' or the '*façade*' where everyone has the same valuable opinion even on specific and specialised topics.

³⁰⁰ The controversial issue of limiting participation and decision-making raises further theoretical questions such as: Why should there be such limit on online decision making while there is none in traditional polls? For instance, for referendums or elections people do not need to prove that they are informed in order to vote. By taking away power from the people, is it not an anti-democratic measure? How do we implement these controls in a way that they are not manipulated to exclude participants rather than including those that are qualified? These and other such question deserve a dedicated focus that cannot find its place here.

decide on the posts together (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014). The blog also publishes posts by journalists, intellectuals, guest editors, representatives, parliamentary groups or regular citizens (see also Roman 2013).

Besides being the main communicative instrument, the blog incorporates the main system to make decisions.³⁰¹ The M5S adopted other online tools over time in two distinct forms: on the one hand, Casaleggio developed software for online decision-making and incorporated them within the blog. In 2013 it became a more organic set of applications named 'operating system', and in 2015 was enriched and renamed 'Rousseau',³⁰² although it is sometimes referred to as the 'M5S portal', 'portal' or 'lex',³⁰³ it is a set of applications that enhance the decision making power of the certified members of Grillo's blog.³⁰⁴ On the other hand, local communities developed their own web pages and adopted customised social networks and e-democracy software beyond meetup.com. At both levels, the M5S makes a massive use of social networks.³⁰⁵

The network activism that characterises the discourse of the M5S aims at implementing direct democracy through online instruments of deliberation and decision-

³⁰¹ For certain issues like the selection of candidates, the approval of bills (for example the electoral bill), the expulsion of a member, the nomination of the directory or the selection of two members of the appeal committee.

³⁰² In the text 'Rousseau' and 'M5S operating system' are used interchangeably. The Platform Rousseau was inaugurated in April 2016 at the internet address: <https://rousseau.movimento5stelle.it/>.

³⁰³ Lex is the application of the M5S operating system that implements an interaction among the representatives and the users (of the blog) to discuss, comment and suggest amendments to a bill. With the first version of the operating system, only elected representatives at the national and European level could submit bills to discussion. Rousseau includes the bill proposed by Regional MPs and normal activists.

³⁰⁴ A member is certified if she is over eighteen, is not part of any other political organisation with contrasting purposes with respect to those of the M5S, and has sent a scanned version of their identification document. The certification process may take up to two months (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009a, 2014). After certification, the member needs to wait a few more months before being able to acquire the full right to vote, each poll discriminates that all members that are certified before a specific date (generally 6-12 months earlier) are eligible to vote.

³⁰⁵ Vaccari *et al.* (2015) demonstrate how the use of social media is a consistent part of political engagement and contributes to the measurement of participation permitted by electronic tools. They maintain that 'access to political information and the opportunity for self-expression on social media contribute to these qualities rather than endangering them.' Moreover they 'treat citizens' expression on social media as a substantial and potentially consequential mode of political engagement rather than a diversion from it' (Vaccari *et al.* 2015:233). Bentivegna (2013) demonstrates that the use of twitter permits a top-down as well as horizontal interaction, however horizontality manifests itself in isolated homogenous spheres (citizens, journalists, bloggers...), while top-down centralisation of communication is controlled by the 'traditional elite' (politicians, journalists and so on) who have a predominant communicative role compared to citizens. This study was carried out in May 2012 after the M5S's success in Parma.

making that allow a direct participation of common people in politics. In other words, Grillo's announced cultural, political and methodological revolution through e-democracy needs – an efficient and effective instrument that can achieve such scope, as this is paramount. This is the reason why the low and slow implementation of an e-democracy infrastructure is among the main points of internal discontent within the M5S.³⁰⁶

Different groups of activists worked in parallel to Casaleggio Associati to propose e-democracy instruments based on the open source philosophy and these were collectively developed. Local and regional groups adopted 'liquid feedback' and suggested its implementation at the national level. The Pirate Party adopted liquid feedback in various countries, especially in Germany, as the device for e-democracy.³⁰⁷ A group of activists in Lazio region developed the liquid feedback code and created the software 'parelon' ('*PARLamento Elettronico Online*' – online electronic parliament), a project supported by the M5S MPs in the regional council.³⁰⁸ Other M5S local groups adopted 'airesis',³⁰⁹ promoting direct e-democracy. All these software for e-democracy are increasingly developing the 'deliberative dimension' beyond voting systems.³¹⁰ E-democracy is not just about making decisions but is

³⁰⁶ Low implementation refers to the limited democratic functionalities and procedures available in the M5S operating system as opposed to other similar software. Slow implementation refers to the delay in developing the software because activists are demanding it for a long time, they are available to cooperate for such developments since the origin of the movement and because those instruments are already available through open-source platforms.

³⁰⁷ For an insight on the software and an analysis of its use in large scale see (Bertone, De Cindio, and Stortone 2015).

³⁰⁸ Parelton improves the graphic of liquid feedback and introduces some structural innovations such as the creation of random commissions of experts to increase the rate of technical analysis of proposed actions. A commission of experts is created from a list of citizens available for each specific area. The software makes a random selection of some of the members of the commission until a quorum of 20-50 people available in that moment can answer a punctual political issue to which representatives in a parliamentary committee or in the parliamentary plenary have to vote for. This feature is an attempt to facilitate the use of e-democracy in order to apply participatory democracy within institution and against the constraint of making many decisions in a short period of time – typical of institutional working days. It creates a limit to user actions (i.e., votes) in order to prevent the formation of excessively active influencers and increase equality among participants (Chiusi 2013a)

³⁰⁹ The expelled M5S MP Massimo Artini and 'Free Alternative' (*Alternativa Libera*), the parliamentary group that he founded with other ex M5S MPs, together with three other associations, launched a different open source e-democracy platform named 'sinapsi' that is partially based on airesis. Artini believes that the M5S' Rousseau is not a free and open software and he is highly critical of the slowness of its development (Gangale 2015b).

³¹⁰ These platforms adopt the philosophy based on the Schulze method of qualified voting by which they increase the quality of the vote expressed (Schulze 2010).

also about increasing online interaction to intensify participation and transparency in order to reduce elitism and manipulation.

Casaleggio Associati holds the M5S monopoly for the implementation of e-democratic instruments officially adopted by the movement. To contrast the growing appeal that open source platforms generated among the M5S local groups, Grillo clarified that the only official e-democracy software of the M5S is the one developed in house,³¹¹ the M5S Rousseau.³¹² Announcing 'Rousseau' in July 2015, Grillo stated:

Its objectives are the management of the M5S in its various elective components (Italian and European parliaments, regional and municipal councils) and the participation of members in the democratic dynamics of the M5S, for example, writing bills and the vote for the choice of electoral lists and to settle positions in the M5S (Grillo 2015d).

Rousseau is a software that is an instrument being developed to face the democratic challenge of the movement to win elections. Within the institution, it provides an innovative interaction between representatives and represented. The following paragraph will explore the criticisms targeted at the M5S operating system before it critically assesses these criticisms and the M5S's e-democracy innovations.

6.3.3 Criticism to the M5S' e-democracy

Beppe Grillo holds the property rights of the M5S logo and of the websites related to the movement, including his own blog. Rousseau, is hosted on Grillo's blog and is developed by Casaleggio Associati (and the Rousseau Association created by Davide Casaleggio in 2016). It is the main M5S e-democracy tool and collects most of the criticism. These are the main reasons for what Rossana De Rosa defines 'cybercratic centralism' the 'semantic extension of "democratic centralism", which has been used to describe the kind of party organization with a strong internal discipline and a centralisation of all steering functions' (De Rosa 2013:130 footnote #1). The literature and the ethnographic data, provide a number of arguments that tend to give some confirmation to these allegations. These arguments are based on technical

³¹¹ In the *post scriptum* to the post of 19 September 2013, that announced the forthcoming launch of the first version of the M5S operating system, Grillo stated: 'Please note that there are no certified applications outside of those of the blog' (Grillo 2013c). A few days later another post announced the functionalities of the e-democracy platform to come (Grillo 2013h) and the M5S operating system was launched at the end of October (Grillo 2013a).

³¹² The M5S operating system was promptly criticised by Davide Barillari (Chiusi 2013b).

points and procedural choices of the M5S leadership. Besides being constantly under construction, the M5S's e-democracy's design is incomplete and the leadership is reluctant to accept collective attempts to collaborate.³¹³ Adopting an issue-based decision making mechanism, Grillo and Casaleggio exclude participation from defining the political line of the M5S. There is no on-going process, or there is no clear path to start a process or to structure a debate about an issue related to the political line of the movement.³¹⁴ The representatives decide the political line on single issues at the national, regional and local level while the leadership maintain the political line of the movement as such.

The M5S suffers from information overload, which is the result of the absence of a system to handle the comments (especially in the blog). This is the cause of dispersion of opinions and the dilution and neutralisation of massive participation.³¹⁵ The leadership freely

³¹³ At the local level, meetup groups can adopt – and *de facto* they do – the platforms they prefer, but they are not official. No e-democracy platform adopted by any meetup group can be circulated as the one adopted by the M5S to provide e-infrastructure at the local level. Critics point out that the M5S e-democracy platforms are created, developed and controlled by Casaleggio Associati. Basilio (M5S municipal representative, interview) confirms that there is no dialogue concerning the e-democracy software in place and the blog does not permit a real exchange of opinions. Although the leadership advocates the openness of the internet, the M5S does not take advantage of the collective intelligence in developing its own e-democracy project but prefers to handle it in-house and with a closed code (as opposed to open source). For Federico Pistono (M5S Activist), the elected representatives of the movement – not Grillo and Casaleggio – should manage the M5S operating system and its technical infrastructure should be independent from the blog besides being mutually inspired. He is highly critical of the centralised methods adopted by the M5S leadership and he proposed alternative solutions but was not listened to. He tried to raise the leader's attention both by contacting the staff, the leadership and the M5S MPs, all without success. Casaleggio affirms that the M5S listens to critiques and comments through the comments on the blog – which are normally read and, if deemed relevant, followed up on – the email staff@beppegrillo.it, and the interaction with the representatives (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 Video #2 minute 39ss). Pistono tried these contacts and to communicate with Grillo and Casaleggio and their close collaborators directly but he was negated the requested slot of time (interview Federico Pistono). Jacopo (former M5S MP, interview) tells that together with other MPs he took part in a MPs working group to debate with Casaleggio the adoption of open source e-democracy innovations such as liquid feedback or airesis. Casaleggio informed that Casaleggio Associati was developing suitable technical solutions and assured the group that they would be updated through monthly meetings, but eventually there was no follow up.

³¹⁴ Oscar (former M5S senator, interview) maintains that besides technicalities, collective decisions about policies and political line should be deliberated horizontally. If they are to formulate a bill, the general principles of the bill should be drafted collectively and then a commission of experts, which comply with the inputs of the M5S community, can write the bill text. Oscar lamented the absence of a platform (or an application within the M5S operating system) for the democratic debate on ideas with experts and representatives. Pistono (interview) argues that the form of the debates within the blog and in Rousseau, including in lex, is just a series of atomised comments that everybody writes but nobody can systematise. Lex is top-down not bottom-up because only elected representatives can start a bill discussion. The latest version of the operating system foresees the inclusion of a bottom-up lex application allowing activists to propose bill for the discussion.

³¹⁵ 'The problems endemic to designing platforms that prevent information overload and differentiate meaningful content from unhelpful posts are issues that remain unsolved' (Federici et al. 2015:297). For this problem, Pistono (interview) proposes a solution, a structure (and software) to acknowledge the feedbacks of

decides priorities and implements forms of censorship controlling and filtering the comments and deleting some of them.³¹⁶

The online decision-making mechanisms are managed by the leadership who decide the rules of the online interactions, for instance, what can be done and what cannot, which functions should be implemented in the operating system and how they should work. The leadership decides who can vote, not only by certifying the members of the blog but also by revoking such certification (officially through expulsion and unofficially with technical problems that inhibit the user from accessing the system properly).³¹⁷ The leadership specifies that only members certified before a specific date can vote (for example, concerning the parliamentary elections or the selection of candidates for the European elections). There is no transparency concerning the M5S membership (certified members) and details of voting

the community and give a value in return. Pistono proposes a series of software (stack overflow, user-voice, mediawiki) and procedural solutions (foreseeing the approval of a commission of experts to evaluate the feasibility) to filter various contributions, rate, rank and open them to collaborative amendments passing through a mixture of online and offline participation to strengthen the whole process. Online members should have a reputation that makes them accountable and gives value to their contributions. Stackoverflow.com is a made by peers website where IT programmers can ask and answer questions by others and each user has a reputation built through her participation in the community. Uservoice.com is a software that helps to collect and analyse feedbacks in order to design an organisational strategy based on them. Mediawiki.org provides the open source code to build a collaborative platform where user can amend the content of specific sections of the collective work; it is based on a system of reputation and mutual support. Mediawiki is the base code of Wikipedia.org.

³¹⁶ The site nocensura.eusoft.net collects the comments that are deleted daily from Grillo's blog. Censorship is also exercised with the mass commenting, social reputation destroyer techniques of the trolls (users that intentionally create confusion and distraction by mean of offensive and detractive comments), fake users and mass manipulation which Casaleggio's company would allegedly put in place to move consensus and dissent with specific topic or members (Mello 2013:98–121; Santoro 2012:98–103, 2014:105–10).

³¹⁷ Oscar tells that some activists could not participate to the parliamentaries because they faced technical problems to log in the Grillo's blog and Casaleggio Associati could not solve them in time. The security level of the M5S operating system is basic for internet software, the identity is asserted by simple username and password. Other platforms use more advanced instruments such as one-time token (parelon), banks adopts the sms token and/or code cards to reduce the risk of intrusion. Barillari, M5S Regional MP in Lazio region, openly criticise several aspects of the M5S operating system including the lack for security (Chiusi 2013b). It has direct implication for the accountability of the results including for the relative easiness in manipulating and stealing of account information by others. Other consequence include the easiness to create trolls, assume other's identity in the act of voting, uncontrolled delegation of the vote, multiplication of fake users. These manipulative techniques are all possible but there is no evidence that the M5S leadership makes a systematic use of them, excluding the deletion of comment from the blog. The relatively low number of voters within the M5S operating system provides two opposed consideration: on the one hand there is a higher possibility that the votes are real corresponding to the activists that are more engaged on the ground or online within each constituency. On the other hand, it is relatively easier to manipulate results when the manipulative intervention can be discrete and change the overall result by neutralising or directing a few profiles.

results. On the contrary, other platforms make available the list of users and the list of votes cast in order to increase transparency.

Online consultations are decided, defined and managed by the leadership that for example, decides the options available. Among the most criticised cases on this subject concerns the choice of participating in a parliamentary group at the European parliament (Grillo 2014c, 2014a; Mosca 2015:46–48). Federico Pistono (M5S Activist) explains this problem very clearly:

They put on lex [the operating system] those things that Grillo says on his blog and then they make you choose A, B, C or D. [For instance that is the choice that we had to do after the European Elections of 2014 when we had only unwanted options and not the coalition with the greens that most of us preferred]. The game of democracy, I have always said this, is not to vote. The vote is actually useless. [...] The point is not to vote, the point is how we arrive at decisions on which to vote. [...] And how they come to submit proposals, which is the whole game... and indeed that kind of game it still opaque... then they are beginning to make the vote transparent... but who cares about a transparent vote between unrepresentable choices? (Interview Federico Pistono).

His main critique is not technical but methodological, as he rejects the method having the leadership decide the options of a poll and the members of the movement opting for one or the other. He maintains that a true deliberative and participatory exercise is not based on the vote *per se*, but rather on the deliberation from which the option would result as a collective outcome. Pistono maintains that in such conditions the vote is even less important than deliberation.

The leadership is the author of the consultations, as it can present an argument in a way that privileges (implicitly or explicitly) one of the available options.³¹⁸ Anselmo (M5S activist, interview) maintains that the membership lines up with its preference and the majority usually follow it. With the prominence of the vote over deliberation, there is a concrete risk of changing democracy into the rule of the majority and to fall back on the limits of liberal democracy. This attitude is the cause of distress for activists when an online poll is

³¹⁸ Martino (interview) brings more evidence to the debate with the example of polls on expulsions of the M5S members, where there is no discussion. The leadership decides to open the poll, it does not provide a concrete and detailed list of allegations and the member who is put for expulsion does not have a space to defend herself or put an argument to invite people to vote against her expulsion. See for instance the case of Artini and Pinna (Grillo 2014e) or the expulsion of Battista, Bocchino, Campanella and Orellana (Grillo 2014h). However, also political and strategical decisions may follow this rule, as for example, the case of the vote for the European parliamentary group is again very appropriate because it clearly forced the choice towards the EFDD (Mosca 2015:46–48).

launched. Many times, the result seems to be the confirmation of a decision taken in advance by the leaders.

There is no rule on how to open an online poll. Above it was mentioned that Jacopo (former M5S MP) wanted to open a poll to ask the M5S membership about a political decision to be made in a parliamentary committee, but the leadership, i.e., Casaleggio, did not allow it. Although seldom done, the leadership can open a consultation on a political issue, as they did in the well-known case on the abolition of the crime of illegal immigration.³¹⁹ Discretion depends upon the communicative appeal of the issue at stake and this form of opening polling creates an unbalance of online voting. For example, in 2013 there were only three online consultations while in 2014 certified members of Grillo's blog have been called to vote 23 times (Mosca 2015:42).³²⁰

³¹⁹ Senators Buccarella and Cioffi promoted the abolition of the crime in the senate and the next day Grillo and Casaleggio pointed out that this was a personal initiative (Grillo and Casaleggio 2013). After three months of debates, with a profound political significance because the issue is extremely divisive between left and right political views – both present in the movement (as we shall see below) – the majority of online voters (15.839 out of 24.932 with 80.383 right holder) agreed with the senators against the M5S leadership (Castigliani 2014).

³²⁰ After the regulations of the M5S 'association' the party-movement agreed to comply with Italian legislation. If activists want to propose a poll to the M5S operating system they have to pass severe obstacles through extremely demanding procedures. Promoters must collect signatures, names, fiscal code and the number of the document used to register in Grillo's blog of 500 certified members. They have to send the petition in hard copy to Beppe Grillo in Milan (Casaleggio Associati's seat). After receiving the proposal, it is published online within a month and stays online for a week, after which the certified members can support such a proposal by expressing their preference between 8 am and 6 pm. If the proposal receives the support of 1/5 of the members, it is put forward to a vote within 30 days. There are a number of reasons why this procedure makes it challenging for the base to propose a poll. First, the use of e-democracy is quite limited along the procedure, intuitively one could expect the operating system to have a special application for this purpose that would facilitate and encourage the proposals from the bottom-up. The initial number of signatures has to be collected physically, on the ground and just from the M5S certified members, therefore excluding the meetup activists not registered on the blog. The membership of most meetup groups does not reach 500 activists in total (even less counting only the M5S certified members). Moreover, the experience at the base is that controversial issues may divide the group and this would complicate the collection of signatures, and there is generally a core component which is extremely loyal to Grillo that would hardly consider proposals not coming from the leadership (Sabatini 2015). The leadership has the discretion to validate or to not the signatures. The time required to go from the phase of presentation to the voting is quite long it (ranges the 10 weeks). The regulation does not specify if 1/5 of members have to be certified members (which are much less than general members), however, this seems obvious by the fact that they need to be certified in order to be able to vote. Assuming that it refers to certified members the number of subscriptions required is demanding compared to the percentage of voting turnout of the last M5S polls that ranged between 20 and 30% (Mosca 2015:44). There is no information concerning the possible notice of the vote to the promoter, implying that it will be left to the discretion of the leadership. Nor are there any details about any space to argue in favour of the proposal from the part of the promoters. Finally, once the vote is approved, the rest of the general criticism referring to online polls remains, especially the discretion of the leadership that can formulate the poll and influence the vote for the preferred option.

Finally, there are a number of criticisms related to the fact that online polls are not announced ahead of time. The leadership activates and defines the timeframe of online consultations and, contrary to what Federici *et al.* affirm (2015:293), they rarely open these after having posed a notice, but rather, they tend to do it suddenly.³²¹ This may well be a trade-off between transparency and security together with the time-slot allowed to the vote (generally being between 7 and 12 hours). Indeed, as Federici *et al.* maintain, ‘this is done to avoid lobbying, reduce the possibility of net trolling (by not giving trolls the opportunity to plan their attacks) and get votes mostly from the truly active subscribers’ (*ibidem*). The reverse side of the debate is that generally, there is not enough time for preparation, information gathering, participation, and discussion. People are forced to express a vote that most often may lack the necessary information to be substantiated, and as a consequence it increases the rate of those who vote following an ‘influencer’ or the indication of the leadership. A general impediment is that many members may be unavailable in that period (during office working hours), but the most hostile critics argue that voters in line with the leadership may be informed in advance and therefore they maintain a sort of supremacy.

6.3.4 E-democracy, reasons and innovations of the M5S

The introduction of e-democracy and its impact in political life is still unveiling. We are currently in a transition that opens up space for uncertainties, innovations and criticisms. Studies of the last two decades have demonstrated how the internet enhances the freedom and independence of access to political information and reduces the gap between people who are well informed and active in political debates and those who feel excluded from the political sphere (Reedy and Wells 2009). The quality of participation and deliberation made available, especially by the evolution of the web 2.0, is still difficult to address because there is a lack of theorising to be done along with a lack of congruent cases. The e-democracy of the M5S is a

³²¹ This is further confirmed by Mosca (2015:43) and Pistono (Carboni 2014b). The statement by Federici *et al.* is probably due to their methodological design based on interviews to the M5S activists and representatives (presumably Grillo’s faithful followers) and documents produced by the M5S. As they mention in the conclusion, comparative (as opposed to case) study would bring further understanding however it would remain biased without the expansion of the investigation within the movement, for instance interviewing critical voices (such as ex-activists and ex-representatives), as done in the present research, delivers a more congruent vision of the case.

case that demonstrates, the limits and perspectives of online deliberation based on the practice of the leadership, the activists and the software utilized.

It is germane to go through the assumption that the level of innovation brought by the M5S, not only in the political landscape but also in its meta-political constitution, has been unprecedented in Italy and beyond (Biorcio and Natale 2013; Urbinati 2014). The innovation carried out by the M5S e-democracy is attested by Morozov who argues that the M5S parliamentarians were the first to use e-democracy applied to such a scale (Morozov and Menichini 2013). The M5S uses the web in a polity with an institutional and non-institutional combination of e-democracy platforms. They include information and organisation as well as implement action of political and administrative articulation and interaction. They have marked a turning point in the organisation of political actions via the web.

The novelty of the M5S can be identified in its capacity to synthesise the transitions in forms that open up to horizon of development, be it for improvement or as alternative proposals. The role of the leadership and its centralised management of the M5S's e-democracy takes a newly uncharted path in which experimentalism is unavoidable as well as failures and progressive improvement.³²² Giacinto (M5S activist, interview) is an expert of internet communication and he admits that initially the cyber centralism employed by Grillo was irritating for him because Grillo made use of the blog in a way that was similar to the old broadcast media. However, the astonishing victory in 2013 allowed new and honest people to enter in the parliament. This was the sign of the effectiveness of such a communication strategy (although technically badly structured). Giacinto explains his initial strong criticism, his change of mind and the technical geniality of (Grillo and) Casaleggio:

Grillo passed for a great innovator, because he used the web. Now, of course, for me that I was dealing with these things for years, and I had also read the basic literature on those

³²² The diversity of local experimentalism has provided a range of solutions but none of them has been replicated overall in the country. On the one hand, this is due to the neutrality of the national leadership on the matter, which does not encourage local groups to invest time and resources in adopting one of the solutions available because none is official. If the leadership would encourage the adoption of one of the platforms, most groups would probably follow the suggestions and Casaleggio Associati (or Rousseau Association) may look forward to expand Rousseau's functions to handle local communication. On the other hand, this is a sign that none of the solutions emerged from the base was able to gain competing visibility compared to other software – and therefore that experimentalism is still needed. It is a mistake to think that the perfect e-democratic solution could comply with the needs of different groups, a diversity of uses increases group satisfaction. However, this whole issue gives the figure to the complexity of the argument.

things... to see Grillo as a guru of the web did not just make me smile but pissed me off in some ways. Defining the blog of Grillo... I had my blog... rather sectorial. I was in the web, in the so-called blogosphere, I knew how it works. And see that every time Grillo appeared as major Italian blogger, even in the world rankings... and then you see that it is not a blog, because it had none of the typical elements of a blog, if not perhaps the name. [...] First of all, in the blogosphere one puts oneself on equal level with respect to the interlocutors. So, you simply propose the themes but then you participate in the discussion as everyone else. But this is totally absent in Grillo's blog in which I saw... these things top-down by a sort of guru, and then thousands of comments of stream, as an outlet of people who did not understand anything of what he was talking about, and he clearly could not answer everything, so a mechanism still one to many. [...] Nothing to do with the revolution of Web 2.0 that we lived in those years, those who were inside [the web], and so we knew well how much effort you need to succeed, to become a quality blogger and become slowly appreciated for what you write. When you transfer from a top-down system of communication, as was the one of Grillo, a great famous personality, the star of the mass media, it is easy to transpose on the internet, because you practically transpose the old into the new medium, but you mortify the new one. And that's what happened there. [...] Of course, so in this kind of analysis, I could not like Grillo for the reason that he was a hyper-populist, and because [he brought] a mass culture [to blogs] that I detest. [...]

The level of awareness of the network [in meetup groups] was and still is sometimes very humiliating. That is, there are people who cannot even manage communication in a forum, without letting [it] degenerate into insults, I mean... that's one of those things that you learn to do before, if you are aware of what that means, that medium. Otherwise, I repeat, the outlet of Grillo is very little compared to degenerated situations, widespread though – I must say – on a national scale. [...] In various meetups around the country, the ones I met, there is an unawareness of this amazing thing. So you [Grillo], you say that the movement was born on the web, then you have not only a blog which is not a blog, but it's amazing because you even sell your products on the side... then you are just a television set on the internet almost, right? And, then you tell me that you are a blogger, that you are innovative and that you have the idea of the web as innovation, when the network is just the opposite – it destroys this oligarchic structure, etc.? [...]

“Grillism” has many contradictions. Surely [Grillo] succeeded – dominating these contradictions – to make something positive out of them. The movement actually did many good things, including basically putting honest people in that place of robbers [substituting MPs in the parliament]. [...] Most of them were people just like you and me, ordinary people, the honest, [...] the marginalized, those who are neither servants of power nor in power. [...]

How did he do? The most important thing he has done is to manage this level of horizontal meetup, or at least the community that takes care of the territory, again with this exasperated oligarchic structure in the figure of Grillo, then Casaleggio, who managed these things top-down. Now he, Casaleggio, at the time of passing, understood – that – it was a moment of transition between the society of so called telecracy, then berlusconism, renzism, as we want to put it, the years 1980-1990, etc., to the transition to a network society – which in any case, is still in progress because it is still a passage – he understood that he had to use them both and mix them. He created the base [of activists] that went on the web, on horizontal arrangements, and then he still kept, to win a lot of votes, the top-down management structure from the old mainstream. Even populist sometimes. [...] It is the so-called ‘remediation’, i.e., in the transition from one media regime to another, it is not that one disappears and another appears, but rather it is that the new reworks the past. Therefore, the network, in many cases, revised the old culture of the press, television, etc. And he managed to do it, for me, in a spectacular way at times, with that blog that indeed is not a blog. It is also a bit television, a bit theatre show, it is a bit of everything. But he managed to do it in a crazy way, I repeat, one does not get to 25% with the network society.

[...] *What is interesting is that they did it for good, all things considered, that is, for a common good (interview Giacinto).*

Giacinto denounces the contradictions of Grillo's blog and admits his criticism for the way Grillo entered the internet and turned into a successful blogger without really being a blogger and violating a certain deontology. This infraction was the key of Grillo's success, which is the 'remediation', the transition into a new media (web) without a traumatic interruption from the old one (TV, press, etc.) and this coincided with political success.

Casaleggio was able to combine verticality with horizontality, that is, the old media with the new media and achieve a diffusion and success that champions the emerging 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick 2013) that is bringing the blog in TV, due to the absence of the M5S representatives from TV shows (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2015:464). His political 'remediation' took the form of 'hypermediacy' where the passage to the new media is done by emphasising the new medium, the web, and diminishing the old medium, the press and television (Bolter 2000; Bolter and Grusin 1999). Casaleggio's remediation hides the process or remediation as it announced the end of the old media but reproduced its content and communicative form in the new media.³²³ This process has increased the sphere of influence of the M5S beyond the average limit of the web. Adopting the old media communication strategy, the transition from the old to new media became immediate for Grillo's followers, especially if they were not particularly skilled (but yet users) of the web.

Giacinto reveals that beyond the misuse of Grillo's blog (and M5S e-democracy) there is a political development that is for the common good. Through the remediation Grillo and Casaleggio also combined centralism and horizontality, the presence of a central leadership that keeps the movement compact with freedom at the grassroots where power is shared spontaneously.³²⁴ This is the controversial geniality that does not choose between society and

³²³ The video *Gaia* (Casaleggio Associati 2008), tells about an apocalyptic decline of the world managed by the old politics and the eventual victory of WWII, local politics will swiftly mushroom all around the world through local groups of organised activists. Collective intelligence will elect the first world government in 2054, where people will not need passports, full transparency is implemented and parties, religions and ideologies disappear. Before the apocalyptic phase, the video tells how the Internet is changing politics, resuming the use of social networks to collect campaigns fund and votes. While this video raises much criticism, it can be interpreted as a 'mere' milestone in the process of remediation orchestrated by Casaleggio.

³²⁴ The risk of e-democracy, which Casaleggio is well aware of, is dispersion and fragmentation – actually recurrently occurring at local level. Fragmentation diminishes the electoral potential of the movement

politics, but makes the two co-exist where they both have a primacy over their technical implementation – or the e-democracy formality. The M5S does not follow an e-democracy ideology but it uses e-democracy to achieve political and social objectives. Such use is necessarily insufficient when confronted with the ideal type of virtual participation, but it is successful in attracting supporters on the ground and in the political arena.

If the issue of cyber centralism is particularly painful for a movement whose motto is ‘each one counts for one’, one must underline that favouritism is not a novelty in Italy where the major political parties of the last two decades have been built around one political figure.³²⁵ Moreover, Grillo and Casaleggio are by choice leaders outside institutions, a unique situation in the Italian landscape. With streaming and broad use of video coverage and reports, the M5S makes the political experience one of a technology that was merely available in theory or experimented on a small scale before.³²⁶ This massive use increases the publicity of representatives and communication with the public.³²⁷ The technology for streaming is available to all political forces, but none of the competitors have developed the capacity of the M5S of making its use a praxes on a regular basis and most parties make use of them just in political campaigns (Bentivegna 2006). No other political force has developed an e-democratic culture that prepares the constituency to demand such informative flow and make use of it, however inconstant it may be for the movement itself (Sæbø, Braccini, and Federici 2015:248). The M5S has had an impact on the political culture of the country.

and therefore its capacity to achieve its objectives. To protect the movement from the risk of such a drift, the national leadership decided to centralise e-democracy.

³²⁵ The Democratic Party – that was an exception to this rule – sees the affirmation of the ‘iper-personalisation’ of Matteo Renzi (Diamanti 2014a:588).

³²⁶ The M5S streaming channel ‘la cosa’ (http://www.beppegrillo.it/la_cosa/) and the M5S website dedicated a section to the parliament communication and reports the work of the M5S representatives (<http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/parlamento/>). Video-reports are regularly published to keep the audience informed about the M5S’s initiatives and work within institutions. The series ‘#5giornia5stelle’ relates main topics of the previous week, while other videos are published on specific issues. The bill proposed for discussion and the operating system are also introduced with a video. The importance of this material stands in the fact that ‘the presence of vast searchable online archives of news content means that stories or fragments of stories can lay dormant for weeks or even months before they erupt and are integrated into the [information] cycle’ (Chadwick 2013:64).

³²⁷ It may not be a general public because the web is not homogeneous and opens the space for the emergence of various spheres in which various audiences follow different information cycles and they create new democratic perspectives in which the centrality of representation and its form is questioned (Diamanti 2014a; Manin 2014).

Many of the critiques directed at the M5S leadership do not involve other parties because other parties do not expose themselves to participatory procedures as much as the M5S does.³²⁸ The movement's experiments and innovations achieve spaces that other parties do not achieve, and therefore, it is myopia to criticise the M5S for its fallacy in this experimentalism.³²⁹ The M5S is also a stimulating space of modernisation and rouses the ICT to provide responses. The creation of *parelon* and *airesis* are examples of a way of e-democratisation that occurred because the M5S generated problems that needed to be solved. Multi-scale experimentalism of the M5S e-democracy enhances the concept of *demodiversity* (Santos 2006c:39), that is, developing multiple forms of local democratic organisation. The M5S diffusion as a whole is a 'peaceful or conflictive coexistence in a given social field of different models and practices of democracy' (Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXIII).³³⁰

The M5S has shown an innovative capacity of using the internet to organise political and civic actions, so as to not remain isolated on the web but rather to refurbish the use of

³²⁸ E-democratic attempts made by other parties have faced severe obstacles. In 2013 the Italian Democratic Party has adopted liquid feedback in two short experiences at regional (*ProposteAmbrosoli* – Lombardy) and national (*TuParlamento* – coordinated by Senator Puppato) levels. The relatively poor results of these initiatives show that the path in implementing e-democracy in political parties is all but immediate and rather complex (Bertone et al. 2015). E-democratic efforts of the M5S, although highly perfectible, are innovative besides being unparalleled by any other party initiative at the same level.

³²⁹ Among the best online participatory experiences of the movement, and one that many members refer to, was the drafting of the electoral bill M5S in 2014. Professor Giannuli was asked to 'illustrate the mechanisms of electoral systems and their effects in order to gradually formulate a question (majoritarian or proportional? uninominal college or list system? preference or not? Etc.). Then there will be an internal referendum in the movement that will decide point by point' (Giannuli 2014c). Oscar (interview) identifies this exercise as the best experiment that the M5S has undertaken to provide a real tool of participatory e-democracy and that this was the form to go forward. Oscar insisted with Casaleggio to use this operative model more widely to democratise the M5S e-democracy, however Casaleggio responded that it was too costly without giving further reasons. Most of the activists agree that this experience was extremely positive, but not all of them are equally satisfied. Carmen (M5S activist) argues that even in this experience there were shortcomings, for instance, the third poll on the explanatory video was published one day ahead of the relative vote shortening the possibility of the membership to gather further information on the topic discussed before voting. Carmen maintains that besides having studied political science she faced some difficulties in recalling information to follow the discussion and the activists who were completely lay to the subject referred to their influencers of preference (generally national MPs) to decide what to vote for. A last critique concerns the subjectivity of the expert position, as there was no debate after the presentation of Giannuli, he formulated the alternatives to include in the poll and the information provided by him was received as neutral by the membership. This criticism is a sign that experimentalism can provide evidence for innovation because it helps to point out the concerns over an issue.

³³⁰ See also (Santos 2006c:40, 2008b:266). The political decision to follow an ideological orthodoxy in expanding the participatory and e-democracy step forward, or to abandon them for the customary form of democracy is what is going to make the difference for the movement and will provide an interpretation key to understand its capacity to innovate (Bassoli 2014b).

the web and through it organise acts in the polity. The movement made the step from internet-based communication to internet-based mobilisation and '[t]he success of the *Grillini* has been built on a continuous and mutually supportive juxtaposition of offline and online activities.³³¹ It thus shows that the Internet can make a difference only if it is used in combination with more conventional mobilization activities' (Turner 2013b:218). Turner argues that the M5S has been able to extend the activities and debate through the co-existence of multiple spheres, a multiplicity at the local, regional and national levels, increasing the space for democratic organisation and deliberation and maintaining the autonomy of these spheres.³³²

The birth and growth of the M5S would be unthinkable without the independent involvement of citizens, 'the [M5S] originated outside the traditional systems and became a political force through the will of the citizens. In other words, it was citizen-driven rather than party-driven' (Sæbø et al. 2015). The M5S developed from outside institutions, through the guidance of Grillo and Casaleggio, but with a non-party framework. The development had two speeds: a progressive but calm development of Grillo's blog complemented by the operating system at the national level and an extremely dynamic diversity of software at the local level. The adoption of meetup.com provided a basic structure to organise local groups. The decision of the leadership to leave independence at the base has permitted different paths of e-democracy development, decentralising the e-democracy drive and acts as a counter-balance for leadership centralism.³³³

The membership (interviewed activists) of the M5S have a number of reasons why they tend to believe that problematic controversies are part of a transition and that the

³³¹ Physical engagement may be qualitatively facilitated by the use of the web, for instance, Viola and Ugo (activists, interview) prefer to have a pre-screaming online of the activities and members operating on the ground. Through an interactive forum for instance, they try to understand the political ideas discussed before deciding to also commit with a personal physical participation. Taking part in some initiatives of the M5S, the presence of activists with a political orientation different from what they expected, for them, was a delusion.

³³² Manin (2014) and Diamanti (2014a) argue that the public of the M5S is part of a communicative and political sphere while Turner maintains that the movement is divided into various spheres in the sense of groups of activity and community, implying the meetup groups as individual sphere and the overall national movement as the all-encompassing sphere.

³³³ The M5S is also in a counter-tendency with the trend of dissatisfaction with politics. While political party membership and confidence in the representative institutions are in decline, the M5S opened itself up to participation by opening a space for renewal of the political establishment. Furthermore, e-democracy provides the reduction, and almost elimination, of many costs of entire sets of collective political actions.

leadership has been justified in the decisions they have made to date. Vasco has been absorbed by the paternalist logic and simply believes that the democratisation process is long and complex, and therefore the leadership wants to control it for the best sake of the movement. Additionally, Romeo partially understands the logic of the leadership and tends to agree with the need of following a gradual process for the introduction of democratic innovations. He knows that who controls the system manages the power internal to it and maintains that this can be the reason why Casaleggio opposed the development of e-democracy software by independent groups of activists. Besides his understanding, Romeo, as many other activists, expects that e-democracy developments will occur, as the alternative is that the very project of the movement will be at risk. Zeno sustains that the role of the leadership, including their control of the e-democracy software, is necessary to keep the M5S united, especially due to the movement's inexperience. Tullio believes that the cultural transition will be slow but that it should occur through a centralised platform where convergence of administrative levels and information flows will make participation less time intensive.

The high level of local devolution of the M5S is a key point in understanding its political form and force. Generally, activists are engaged at the grassroots as they do not pertain to the movement merely at the virtual level. This is the reason why they do not restrict their judgement to the limits of the e-democratic level. The M5S is not a mere web movement, it is mostly a grassroots and activist led experience on the ground, and this is among the main reasons for the adherence of activists. The process that led the various meetup groups of Lazio to participate in the regional elections of 2013 is just one example. The complex and autonomous process for the definition of the criteria of nomination, the selection of candidates and the collective drafting of the programme are participatory experiences that mark the mind of activists and their political commitment. Likewise, meetup groups connect to the territory and live the kind of experiences that enhance their spirit of belonging and help them endure the limits of the national e-democratic model.

Besides the M5S's systems not being open source software, apologists highlight that it was developed for free and its licence is Creative Commons (Gangale 2015a). Casaleggio rejoiced over losing the poll on the abolition of the crime of illegal immigration as it proves

the true openness and effectiveness of the M5S vote (Castigliani 2014). The strategic choices of the leadership are based on different political and ethical assumptions when it comes to the e-democracy. They are mostly concerned about creating a political identity for the M5S rather than to give a dynamic tool of interaction to a free and open movement. Casaleggio made this clear when he defended the e-democratic system of the M5S as being the response to specific needs of the membership:

We are talking of a set of applications that we have already developed and we have already used and that are there... what does “a platform” mean? It does not mean anything. Today we have an online application, I believe for 4-5 months [since January 2014], allowing all those who are enrolled in the movement to participate in the creation of a bill in parliament that can be proposed by MPs. One of the MPs proposes a certain bill, it is discussed online for about 60 days, those who are registered can discuss it through this application, make suggestions of additions, and also make changes if necessary. This is an application [lex]. Then we have another application that is for the choice of a person [for the nomination for president of the republic] that then arrived to Rodotà [...]. Then we have an application that we used quite often – when we are asked – when there are situations of conflict or otherwise not possible choice between [electoral] lists. [...] We are talking about a situation where there are two lists that are perfect, both ask to participate [in elections] as a [certified] list, in this case we have the opportunity to make [a] vote [for] those who are registered in the movement in that city or in that region. And there is another application. There are another seven or eight, now I do not remember them all. The sum of these applications, what we call it – to give it a name – is the “operating system”. That is, the system through which the movement is operating online. It has nothing to do with the so-called platform for participation that one does not know what it means. Participation in what? To what? I think this is an urban legend that was born with liquid feedback. Liquid feedback has the advantage of having an excellent name. Liquid feedback, liquid democracy... but if one goes and sees... [...] The usability of liquid feedback is almost close to zero, and then it does not include all the things that I said now, but also the other that we are making. [...] [On the future development] the real step is a marketing step, one that is to be able to explain to people that we now have a set of applications that are usable to do some things, which allow the movement to develop (Casaleggio and Travaglio 2014 Video #2 minute 33-39).

Casaleggio defends the M5S’s aim of giving to the ‘masses’ a chance to self-organise and bring into institutions people they choose. He defends the value of the M5S operating system against its weaknesses and against the allegation of the lack of e-participation within the movement. He maintains that it is too simplistic the way critics speak of a ‘platform’ and defends the M5S operating system against liquid feedback. For Casaleggio, the M5S operating system (or Rousseau) is a concrete response to the needs of the M5S, i.e., to achieve the participatory potential deemed necessary by the leadership.

The response seems inappropriate to face the whole range of criticism elaborate above, especially the allegation that the M5S operating system is systematically manipulated.

The picture is blurred in that the M5S works on ideas of participation that may be different than those of the critics. Casaleggio underlines that the M5S is adopting a specific *modus operandi* that suits its needs and its political objectives. The M5S operating system responds to the complexity and political objectives of the movement, as for example, it includes the application to choose an electoral list of candidates to certify, done when local groups are unable to resolve a conflicting situation autonomously. The operating system is an inductive tool developed to address *ad-hoc* challenges emerging from the ground facing the peculiar (non-)structured M5S. This application is one of the resources used to deal with the challenge of fragmentation common to other participatory experiences. E-democracy is being used as a response to the challenges of participation, not only as an instrument to build participation at the grassroots. The 'step marketing' advocated by Casaleggio at the end of the passage is the socialisation of this vision.

By making an analogy with the development of technological equipment, it is possible to understand the concept of marketing as advocated by Casaleggio. Technology is released in an evolutionary flow, where innovations are introduced step-by step in accordance with technical and market logics. For instance, Apple has gained the reputation of a visionary and progressive company able to innovate the market and the use of technologies. Apple, however, does not run after the commercialisation of the most innovative device, and does not do this for two reasons. On the one hand, the use of a technology is progressive and requires a time of adaptation during which users or customers understand the technology and assimilate the technical development in their daily life. It is not too much a matter of learning how to do something but of incorporating that action within one's daily routine. The routine is achieved when there are improved forms of attaining the same or better results, and a new device can allow that kind of betterment. On the other hand, if Apple releases its last iPhone as soon as it is developed, regardless of the market demand for it, it would cut the market for previous versions and would cut customers of their technological routine – assimilation of the new technology would be a revolution not an evolution.³³⁴ However, Apple needs to

³³⁴ Apple, as its competitor, sells its new devices at a higher price while keeping former models in the market to embrace a wider range of users. This double step is effective in the market and gives society a digestive delay of new devices and technologies to be assimilated.

anticipate its competitors' technological evolution before its most innovative device is outlived by competitors. Adopting the same logic, the M5S has an operating system which is unquestionably the most advanced among those in use at the national scale, however it is not the most evolved version possible of such system, and therefore most of the criticism is due to this. The M5S's competitors, however, are far behind, if attempting e-democracy at all, and therefore the M5S does not need to prove its democratic-technology to be superior beyond what it needs. Moreover, the release of new features of its operating system, and the creation of new participatory and interactive features, need to be digested by its community. Even though the system may be relatively easy to use for skilled activists, it may be demanding for most of them, and therefore time for digestion is required. This explains both the caution and the step marketing of the M5S, justifying the bad (manipulation and demagoguery) and the good (a political alternative form to decadent and untrusted party structures), this being what the M5S political project offers.

To conclude, the e-democracy system of the M5S is the concrete response to an idea of the M5S and is a compromise between participation at the base and participation in the representative arena. It tries to foster the party dimension, but also aims to innovate the way the party-movement interacts with the base. This is just one form of possible development of the software, which is directed by the leadership who reject structural participation from the base in defining the strategy. The priority is the party over the movement, and its aim is to fortify the party dimension while including the movement dimension as much as possible. Critics and dissidents would like to give priority to the movement over the party with a structurally participatory e-democratic system, even if this may include political costs for the party dimension. So far, the M5S has followed the leadership's direction and the electoral results seem to justify the choice, but the dissatisfaction with the contradictory approach to participation and the controversies raised by such contradictions are the price to pay for it.

6.4 Populism and participation

The concept of populism and participation are strictly related in the political vision of the M5S. On the one hand, the movement neutralises the negative acceptance of the term populism and transforms it into a democratic objective. To do so, it diminishes the political value of the left and the right in order to create a participatory policy-oriented dynamic

political-line. The following sections elaborate on the following topics: analyse the post-ideological democratic vision of the M5S, understand the level of local autonomy and devolution, comprehend the role of the leadership at the base of the movement and clarify the M5S populist signifier.

6.4.1 *Policy oriented post-ideological experimental approach*

The M5S promotes going beyond the left-right divide and, in the post-ideological perspective, defends its populist (or anti-political, in the understanding of its critics) identity: '[t]he M5S is not right, nor left, is on the side of citizens. Fiercely populist. If a law is good it passes, if it is bad it does not, whoever proposes it, and whoever passes its [M5S'] bill is welcome' (Grillo 2013b; see also Castigliani 2013). Grillo creates a dichotomy between the citizens' side and the left-right side, and between people and parties. Indeed, he does not refer to ideologies but to the political parties representing them in Italian politics, as he refers to the left and to the right meaning the parties of the left and the parties of the right.³³⁵

The term 'post-party' (Mancini 2015) is extremely relevant in understanding the post-ideological approach of the M5S. On the one hand, it clarifies the blame the M5S directs against traditional parties, which are allegedly elitist, procedural and desalinated from the concept of democracy as the peoples' power. The main reason of this accusation is that political parties (of all political orientations) do not hold onto the principles they defend and they equally end up in scandals or democratic-ideological treason when they are within institutions. On the other hand, and consequently, the M5S is post-ideological because it does not claim to represent only left or right wing values or people but both, that is, the people. To make policy decisions on the basis of the opinion and participation of the people, it adopts an alternative communicative and organisational form. This clarifies the tight interrelation between post-ideology and populism. The term 'populism', is defended by the M5S as a counter-argument of those using the term to diminish the political agenda and the (non-

³³⁵ Grillo's public discourse before the creation of the blog or at its beginning united right and left under the same criticism affirming that in Italy the right is the worst and left is the lightly less worst (Scanzi 2012:127 and 170). The intertwine of themes and political ideas of the left and of the right has contributed to the political success of the movement but it is a challenge in terms of organisation as it produces fragmentation. However, this mix has contradicted those who believed that such approach was adapted only at the local level and not at the national one (see for instance Passarelli, Tronconi, and Tuorto 2013:153–57).

)structure of the movement. It is also the instrument to blame (falsely) ideological oriented parties:

Sure, we are populists and we recognise true democracy in the will [of the] people. Sure, we are raging against these parties that have plundered the country and are now making themselves out to be the saviours. Sure, we are raging populists and when we have the majority, we will delete this political class out of history. Raging populists? I like that! (Grillo 2013e).

Populism for Grillo, is the response to the elitism that transforms democracy into an oligarchy and flattens ideological difference between the left and the right. It is not the rejection of ideology, but the awareness that ideological differences are flattened within the neoliberal representative model so that the difference between left and right loses its real meaning. This happens within the institutions and through corruption scandals that are equally likely to touch upon parties of the left and of the right, as for example was the case in the ‘*mafia capitale*’ (capital mafia) scandal of Rome (Grillo 2014b, 2015c). With such awareness, the populist post-ideological claim replaces an obsolete divide (left-right loose significance in the neoliberal polity) while discursively aspiring to open up representation to participatory processes of collective decision making to decide on specific issues. Therefore, the opposition to elitist democracy is equally a struggle against the left and the right within the institutions accused of the same segregation from society.

The movement does not overcome or amalgamate left and right as they emerge in society, but eliminates the false political divide among them in the institutional framework. It incorporates both societal left and right among its themes and voters (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2012, 2013, 2015; Colloca and Corbetta 2014; Corbetta and Vignati 2013; Tronconi 2013),³³⁶ as it lacks a traditional unifying ideological principle (Colloca and Corbetta 2014). This is one of the reasons why it is a political laboratory (Diamanti 2014b).³³⁷ Vasco (M5S activist, interview) maintains that the M5S does not speak about ideology but about idealism as it focuses on valid ideas and this is the reason why it does not accept political compromises. The

³³⁶ Analysts have demonstrated that the initial wave of activists and voters were originally sympathizers of the left (Biorcio and Natale 2013:55–57; Pedrazzani and Pinto 2013:104–16). However, over time, the M5S has been able to win the approval of people who usually vote for parties with liberal and nationalist traditions. The M5S is therefore creating a new political representativeness beyond left and right (Biorcio and Natale 2013:65–66; Pedrazzani and Pinto 2013:118–21).

³³⁷ Oscar (interview) argues that the lack of ideology and party structure creates a vacuum in terms of political ideals to be achieved and this fragments the personal opinion of representatives and activists.

M5S welcomes people deluded from traditional parties and the resulting political post-ideological elitism. This is its primary political focus (as opposed to societal) in its post-ideological orientation. To understand this passage it is important to see how the movement does not negate the ideological value of the left and the right in society, but it does negate the divide among them within representative institutions and tries to go beyond them.³³⁸

Di Battista (2015) published a post on Grillo's blog listing a number of policy positions held by the M5S, he classified them alternatively to the left and to the right and ended up with a number of policies that cannot be identified with the left or the right and that are exclusive to the movement. The M5S discourse is intact in its post-ideological ambition and focuses on the 'needs of the people', a situated political position that does not defend policies considered contrary to the objectives and necessities of the polity.³³⁹ The M5S discourse proposes that its political ideology is not fixed but dynamic and defined collectively, under the guidance of the leadership, on the occasion of emerging issues. Therefore, the M5S leadership affirms that '[i]deas are only good or bad, beyond the left–right ideological spectrum' (Fo et al. 2013:89). Fermo explains that the vision of the M5S starts from its political objectives that originate from ideas that they themselves develop from the working groups at the grassroots.

Ideas need to be there, though not from above, that must be put into circulation. You make a working group, that working group starts from an objective such as a vision. There must be a vision. The vision does not mean ideological, post-ideological vision, in my humble

³³⁸ Coalition governments are the confirmation of the post-ideological status of parliamentary democracy, together with the increasing move towards the right of the Italian Democratic Party.

³³⁹ The left-wing collective Wu Ming maintains that the declared post-ideology of the M5S is a hidden right wing ideology and they defend this for a number of reasons summed up here. The M5S generalise the historical path of the left and the right and provide an indistinct judgement of both. The M5S reformulates the discourse of social movements in crypto-fascist terms, thereby occupying the political space voided by alter-globalist movements. Concerning the caste (political establishment), the M5S misleads the identification of real adversaries and focus on super-national responsible, being thereby evasive in economic analysis. It is organised top-down, not horizontally. It targets false and evasive political objectives and in so doing it protects the real political objectives. The discourse on immigration is the weaker point of the M5S that reveals the crypto-fascism incorporated in the movement. The M5S divides the proletariat from the middle class and inhibits the alliance against the capitalists. In this way, the M5S is not an alternative but a protector of the capitalist system (see also Genovese 2016; Wu Ming 2012, 2013a, 2013c, 2013b). Bilancetti and Tibusi (Cucchi, Gianolla, Albertini, et al. 2015) explain that the insistence on being practice and policy oriented, to focus on local and fragmented issues, without prejudices or theoretical and ideological orientations, is the neoliberal ideology. Natale and Ballatore argue that the M5S is influenced by the digital utopianism typical of the 'Californian ideology' and it reproduces a tension between direct democracy through the web and the online market *laissez-faire*. However, they are different adopting an 'ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards capitalism, the rhetoric of M5S differs from North American digital utopianism, which since the 1990s has decidedly joined the libertarian right' (see also Mazza 2013:197; Natale and Ballatore 2014:113–14).

opinion, I think it is to have a point of arrival. [...] "Zero waste" is already a vision, for example, minimal. [...] I say "I have to get to zero" waste, perfect, how do I get there? And then you build the whole process (workshop with M5S activists).

The operational logic of the movement is objective-based. It has a targeted vision but lacks an encompassing ideological framework in the traditional dichotomous acceptance. Therefore, the focus of the movement is on policies not on politics, and this is also the reason why some policies are to democratise politics (e.g., clean criminal records, equity, no excess in salary and reimbursements of representatives, limit of two mandates, etc.). As underlined by Bilancetti and Cucchi (Cucchi, Gianolla, Albertini, et al. 2015) the freedom from (left or right) ideological politics and the focus on policies, allows the M5S to switch throughout the ideological spectrum, adopting right and left wing positions in different contexts, also allowing the leadership to fold the policy position to satisfy societal sentiments. The focus on local, specific issues, enables it to embrace a wider slot of societal dissatisfaction compared to ideological parties, something that has contributed immensely to the electoral success of the M5S since its inception. In so doing, the movement incorporates contradictory political visions as they emerge within society. Analysis of the M5S electorates show the wide range of ideological positions, and a greater variance. With respect to other political parties, the M5S voters are ideologically incoherent (Colloca and Corbetta 2014). Focusing on policies the M5S overcomes or encompasses the divide on almost all themes, although some controversial issues create major challenges to the M5S.

How does the M5S overcome internal conflicts emerging on complex policies that are traditionally neutralised by ideology? A first orientation comes from the programme of the movement at the national level (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009b) and other founding documents such as the Florence charter (Grillo and Casaleggio 2009). The leadership, the communication structure analysed above and the permanent campaign to captivate voters are a secondary source of political orientation.³⁴⁰ Beyond these dynamics, when new topics emerge they go

³⁴⁰ Beyond the leadership structure and the methods of political direction analysed above, the way the leadership defines political positions is well explained by Oscar (interview). He points out that this is what happened concerning the M5S position in favour of the exit from the European monetary union. Initially the position of the M5S was to initiate a referendum to ask to the people if they preferred to remain in the euro or not. In 2014 the position become slightly but significantly different, supporting the referendum and opting to exit the euro. Oscar maintains that positions like this one are political because they tend to attract the votes from the right, in a pre-electoral completion with the North League. However, they enter in strategic choices uniting perspectives and limits, the perspective of a strong electoral party and the limits of preponderant centralism.

through an uneven debate of the membership, including representatives and activists at all levels – web, national, regional and local. One such case concerned the issue, especially delicate in Italy, of same-sex marriages. The M5S decided quite swiftly on the matter with an online vote posing the question ‘[d]o you support the introduction into our legal system of civil unions between persons of the same sex?’ 85,4% of the 25.258 voters were in favour (Grillo 2014f). In the section dedicated to e-democracy, we penetrated the complexity of reducing such a delicate issue to such a bald question formulation. Here the focus is on the post-ideological implication of these kind of polls. Achille (M5S senator) explains it in detail:

We need to understand whether they [the citizens] favour or not that there is [an] enlargement of homosexual unions and the possibility of adopting a child or not.³⁴¹ This is a fundamental issue, which also involves... it's a matter of conscience... with respect to which there is no right and wrong answer but each one responds with regards to one's own culture, own experiences, own... own desiderata, own experience of openness also in relation to other countries where this is effectively done. So it is important that there are orientations, after which, as part of a delegation that is expressed in the form of a vote on the most important issues, it's easier to identify – and we are there for that – let's say the best organizational forms to make and realize what ultimately is an orientation expressed by citizens. I think this is even more useful [compared to decide on the details] because a single decision made, instead of doing it on individual aspects that are much more detailed and technical, binds you and does not let you be free to expresses a choice. On the contrary, if there had been a choice of principle, it would have been much smoother, confronted to situations that may be a hundred times different, not expressed by the will of the movement but to consider proposals which come also from the other groups and that may be notable (interview Achille).

Achille outlines the M5S's way out of the impasse of ideology. On issues where the answer is not black or white for the movement (or where it and its leadership have not already defined the rightness or wrongness), the movement seeks orientation from the

The response of the M5S community has not been equally as strong as in the past because the number of signatures collected in about 6 months (200.000) was much lower than the 350.000 signatures collected in one day (8 September 2007, V-Day 1) for the ‘clean parliament’ bill. In other words, the political strategy of the movement is digested by the membership with a variation of rapidity depending on the issue.

³⁴¹ The poll did not inquire about the possibility of child adoption and the leadership opted to leave freedom of conscience to MPs (Grillo 2016b). Regardless of the delicate political equilibrium within the Democratic Party (PD) and the M5S (both supporting the bill and both having internal disagreement on the issue of adoption) this experience confirms a level of discretion from the national leadership. The leadership can strategically decide the adoption of one or the other decision-making method (i.e., MPs freedom of conscience vs. online poll) in order to increase membership policy-position compactness in specific situations, on the basis of the network sentiment. This implies keeping both different visions of the issue (left and right) equally (dis)satisfied with the common ground (civil union legislation) without giving a definitive response to the topic of adoption, which would be welcome by leftists and rejected by rightist.

membership.³⁴² That kind of general policy orientation (opposed to detailed decision-making on specific sub-topics) is enough for the representatives to carry on their work and finalise the parliamentary process into details to comply with the parliament, debate constraints and other political forces.

When the definition of the political line does not concern fracturing topics, the M5S turns to representative internal debate to come to a decision. For instance, when the movement needs to elaborate on bills proposed by other parties, the representatives debate among themselves. Leone affirms that the M5S parliamentary group of the lower house meets weekly (and monthly in the plenary with the group of the senate), to discuss the political line on parliamentary decrees currently debated in the parliament. He confirms that in these meetings the orientation is defined by the blog (including online votes and the bill discussed in the Rousseau):

We now do a weekly meeting, while the other parties convene it, I don't know, once a month or when something incredible happens [...]. As soon as we started [the legislature] we had a daily meeting, then, after work began [in the parliament] we saw that it was impossible, just physically you cannot afford it. Nor it is needed, [they were] just blather, parliamentary work is much faster. [In these weekly meetings] you then decide the order of the day, decide the politics on the decrees to carry on. [...] Domestic issues are all already on the blog, on the website of the 5 Star Movement, on the portal. Then there are laws already published. [...] Then it is the parliament that decides, in a sense: here comes the decree on this subject... there is the [parliamentary] assembly, it is discussed and then voted. Obviously, when there are those issues [...] striking, perhaps, where we do not succeed to have a position, and even the assembly is in trouble, then we ask the passage through the web. It happened several times (interview Leone).

To summarise, the national political line of the M5S is built into two levels: those concerning unproblematic issues that the parliamentary assembly decides on, and those issues that are more delicate or about which the group cannot take a decision. The M5S membership is then invited to vote on the blog.³⁴³ The M5S discourse holds that the movement adopts a participatory approach to decision-making, it does so by adapting participation to representation, that is, not holding on to radical participation, but rather,

³⁴² Folco advocates that in the case that the M5S will win the local elections of Latina, it should adopt a similar consultation, expanded to the citizenry, concerning delicate topics. He refers for instance to the camp Al Karama, a former refugee camp now inhabited by a Roma community. It is a case which is the source of controversy among those who defend the inhabitants and others who would like to close the camp.

³⁴³ The influence of the central leadership, as analysed above, remain in the background of these processes.

referring to participation from members when necessary.³⁴⁴ This is an adaptation of participatory ideals to institutional mechanisms, rhythm, and, most importantly, to the post-ideological politics defended by the movement. Complementarity of representation and participation is achieved through a plurality of procedures in a systematised experimentalism. Through online consultations, the movement can arrive at decisions, and do so not on an ideological position, but rather by surveying its membership. At least to some extents, participation is the ideology of the movement.

The presence of the M5S in the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) parliamentary group is among the biggest controversies for the ideological discourse of the movement. EFDD is led by the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) and is considered a right-wing extremist group within the parliament. When asked to give their opinion concerning the group membership in Europe, 78,1% of the voters chose the EFDD among the three options available (Grillo 2014a; Mosca 2015:46–48), although the greens were excluded and they were a favourite option for a large part of the membership. Dora (M5S Euro MP) confirms the post-ideological method of policy-oriented decision making of the M5S as it applies at the European level and unveils the reason behind the choice of the EFDD group:

In Europe [...] we are 17 [M5S Euro MPs] and there is a great respect between us. We had the good fortune to be 17 people with different expertise, and this gave us the opportunity to follow all the parliamentary committees, and each one respects the others' work. So there is a respect and a trust in the work that each one carries on in the parliamentary committee of which he is a member. At a time when there are cross-cutting issues, spanning through various committees, then we meet, even on a daily basis, we confront and pursue the same common line in the various committees. [... For example immigration] because they are topics that can be viewed from different perspectives and then from different parliamentary committees, we evaluate them together to see what kind of action to take. Then of course I'm not going to put into words the aspects [concerning other committees and expertise] because, as much as I may have some knowledge of certain issues, I know that it is more convenient that, for the 5 Star Movement in Europe, a colleague speaks who has specific expertise, who deals with those things on a daily basis in his committees and not me as I deal with other things. [...]

At the European level, the group carries out initiatives that coincide with the principles of the movement. For example, in the environment committee the movement is in favour of reuse, recycling, waste separation, all these things. So all the initiatives that have to do with

³⁴⁴ Folco agrees with this procedure arguing that politics should focus on macro-themes. He gives the example of the basic income bill that the movement promotes as one of its political objectives. This is an orientation for the whole movement and to tackle a number of social challenges that transverse to the whole country, starting from basic economic self-sufficiency, independence of voters from electoral politics, and finding employment. This implies tackling income as a factor of vote-banks.

the environment, it is the environment committee who deal with it as in this light, it is in their direction. It goes without saying that you do not need a referendum or a poll for everything, because there is already a consolidated opinion on these issues. Same with renewable energy, same with the small and medium enterprises, same with the fight against corruption and organised crime etc. etc. There are some of the more sensitive issues that perhaps produce splits, see immigration [...] There are people who say dramatically “they should stay where they are”, “should return to where they are from”, “we do not care at all”, whereas others have a more welcoming attitude. I believe that the task of a spokesperson is also to contribute to information [awareness raising] because very often people's opinions are formed and then consolidated on bad information and it is our job to inform them as much as possible, that is, give them all the information for evaluating a situation well to then be able to take a position on it. [...] Then we put [bills] on lex anyway, when we are speakers (I still talk about Europe), when we are report speakers (which means that we have been commissioned to write first hand by the European parliament), we put them on lex so as to incorporate all the suggestions that come from the people and include them in the form of amendments. [...]

[Concerning the choice of EFDD.] At first, we did not live it very well. In the beginning there was already great prejudice being directed towards the 5 Star Movement which was then strengthened by the entry into the EFDD group. Because of the fact that in Europe the location really matters, that is, of how you are sitting in the plenary, the system politically ranks you. The EFDD group is sitting at the far right. Now with the arrival of Le Pen, it is the next to last, however, until a month ago we were the last group, so we were just the extreme right. And we obviously do not identify with the extreme right, we have always defined ourselves a post-ideological movement, and we have asked several times to sit in the centre. This thing has been denied because the last legislature of the EFDD group was seated at the far right and had to stay there. Therefore, this at the beginning... in short, bothered us a lot. Because obviously we had been branded as xenophobic, as racists, etc. and this thing has affected us a lot. Obviously we, that is, it was a choice that had to be respected because it was taken from the web, by the electorate, and by the citizens. And I must say, at the end, knowing the other parliamentary groups, as a choice, in some respects, it was successful. In the sense that in the other parliamentary groups you are obliged to follow the diktat on the vote that comes to you by the group leader, you cannot turn away from that vote, and... in this way, they are much more constrained. We have the freedom to vote for what we see fit. We then had the opportunity to demonstrate over time our commitment, the quality of our work. We are, I can say, in short, without false modesty, very respected by the other European colleagues. We have been appointed as rapporteurs for various reports of the European parliament, and that in itself is an indication of the esteem that we were able to conquer in this first year in office. So, in short, the initial bias, the scepticism that they harboured against us at the beginning then faded with time and with our practical work done in parliamentary committees. [...]

[Among Euro MPs, the choice of the EFDD] group has been taken in a more positive way by some and in a more negative one by others. The others hoped much more to join the group of the greens, which even today is probably the group that... that is... the group with which we feel more related on various topics. Not all issues though, see economic issues, issues related to the euro, on those we are very different. But on all environmental and energy issues, or related to the protection of fundamental rights, on those we are always in agreement. However, that is, in the end the membership of the EFDD group does not affect the fact of discussing an idea or at least a position that may be similar to that of the greens. Eventually we bring it forward anyway. [...] With respect to Syriza and Podemos as well we are very often in agreement, it is enough to check and verify the votes to see with who we vote more often in agreement with. The fact is that very often they are very rigid. They are very ideological, so their limit is that one, that they stop to an ideological issue and fail however to overcome it and to look to the substance of the proposal. I remember that at

the beginning, if we were presenting a proposal and this proposal came from the EFDD group, or the 5 Star Movement delegation when they still did not know us, they even refused to put their name next to ours even if they shared an agreement for content of the proposal that we carried forward. For us, this does not exist, for us, if a proposal is valid we carry it forward (interview Dora).

Dora confirms that at the European level the scalar and post-ideological method of policy decision making that has been adopted by the M5S was decided at the national level. The group shows a more detailed respect and division of competence among Euro MPs, whom are independent but cooperate on overlapping topics. They generally decide the political line on the base of the consolidated opinion on specific topics. On more sensitive issues, where the M5S collective opinion has not yet been formed, the MPs operate to spread information and raise awareness, as well as discuss bills in the M5S operating system, *lex*. That system welcomes comments from the membership to amend or improve the bill. As a result, MPs survey the membership on those delicate issues even though without a poll and with a sectorial/interested audience. The choice of joining a coalition with the right wing EFDD group was not well received by the membership or among the 17 Euro MPs of the M5S. The ideological bias of the EFDD was unwelcomed by the MPs who did not feel any belonging to the extreme right. They tried to change the prejudice and, although they could not modify their sitting position in the parliament, they achieved some recognition with the quality of their work. The choice of the EFDD, however, was justified for the fact that this group does not create ideological constraints to its members,³⁴⁵ so to the M5S, although sitting in with a right-wing group, can freely continue to apply its policy oriented post-ideological experimental approach on political decisions that in many cases coincides with the greens³⁴⁶ or the radical left.

³⁴⁵ Quoting Farage's press office, Grillo wrote a post on the blog to also clarify that '[t]he Europe of Freedom and Democracy's (EFD) policy of voting freedom shows respect to each political party. Unlike the Greens and many other groups in the European Parliament, the EFD group allows national delegations to vote as they see fit in accordance with their own ideology, political preferences and national interests' (Grillo and Nigel Farage's Press Office 2014). EFD was the group name before EFDD.

³⁴⁶ The M5S has the merit of giving political force and vigour to the topics of the greens in Italy: 'Grillo broached issues that were traditionally the concern of the Greens in a country that, in contrast to protestant European countries, has never had an ecological party capable of influencing national politics' (Urbinati 2014). The M5S participated in the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the defence of Life (Cochabamba Bolivia, 10-12 October 2015, <http://www.jallalla.bo/en/>) while no other politicians intervened from Italy (Busto 2015).

As mentioned above, Di Battista defends that the single policies of the M5S emerge as a sort of mix between elements coming from the left, and others coming from the right.³⁴⁷ The few M5S candidates with a former party membership, generally come from the left³⁴⁸ and Grillo himself has a history that is much closer to the left.³⁴⁹ He participated in events such as the unity party or *festa dell'unità* (Scanzi 2012:219; until the first V-Day in 2007, Vignati 2013:47) of the Communist Party and its hires. He tried to influence Romano Prodi (left wing coalition leader in 2006) with policies collected on the blog and also he applied to be the

³⁴⁷ A number of analyses have assessed the most important themes for the M5S. Bordignon and Ceccarini maintain that Grillo's battles belong to the tradition of the left or new left. 'They related mostly to: environmentalism and renewable energy; the problems of poverty and precarious employment; the battles against the power of big business and the effects of globalization; the morality of the political sphere and civil rights (with regard, in particular, to the guarantee of access to some services and, most notably, to the Net)' but this is associated with an harsh criticism of state bureaucracy, immigration policies and Euro-scepticism which belong to the right (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2015:460). Corbetta and Vignati in November 2013 stated that '[t]he MPs of the [M5S] are likely to end up adhering to – or being caught up in – the euroscepticism of the radical left parties and social movements. Indeed, although extremely variegated, the political views that the WSF [World Social Forum] expresses are chiefly identifiable with this area' (Corbetta and Vignati 2014:60). Turner (2013a) firmly argues that the movement is not post-ideological and clearly a leftist party although with ambiguity. The M5S is 'a very eclectic radicalism, which is dominated by ideas that have been the domain of the far left (such as environmentalism, support of renewable energy, public health care, education, public transport and non-profit organizations as well as regulation of the financial sector) as well as introducing ideas that are either extraneous or in opposition to the far left (especially the proposed abolition of state monopolies and reduction of public administration)' (Turner 2013a:201). Tronconi (2013) maintains that the topics of the electoral campaign of the M5S are closer to the alternative left than to the right. Maggini found out that environmentalism and ethical libertarianism are transversal while economic liberalism is both opposed and supported by the M5S electorate (Maggini 2012:72). Dal Lago (2013) maintains that the ideas promoted by the M5S are an 'ideological patchwork' which include right, left and a third order of notions. Right wing ideas defended by the M5S include the idea of nation, hostility towards immigration politics (this is actually the case for Grillo and Casaleggio but not for the membership as a whole), aversion to worker unions, and defence and support of small and medium sized businesses, respect for the police forces and the insistence of legality as punishment. The left wing component includes support for local social movements and social struggles such as the *No-TAV*, criticism of big corporations, support to the magistracy, promotion of a basic income. A third order of ideas (beyond left and right) supported by the M5S include anti-establishment policies, ecological environmentalism, democratic radicalism (Dal Lago reads it as populism), and e-democracy utopianism (which assimilates the M5S to the Pirate Party). Among the intellectual reference of the M5S there are a few prestigious names, as recalled by De Rosa: '[t]he 5SM takes ideological inspiration from Lester Brown, environmentalist and economist, described by the Washington Post as one of the most influential opinion makers in the world: Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel prize winner for the economy, Jeremy Rifkin expert in International Affairs: Wolfgang Sachs, sociologist: Serge Latouche, theorist on economic degrowth' (De Rosa 2013:138 footnote #9).

³⁴⁸ Only 0,5% of candidates at the parliamentary elections of 2012 (in view of national elections 2013) had been members of another party before entering the M5S, the majority of them belonging to parties of the left: Italy of Values, the Greens, the PDS, and the PSI. Some had been active in the Radical Party and others in the North League (Lanzone 2013:733).

³⁴⁹ Information that has also been confirmed by those who follow him on Facebook, 'Beppe Grillo Facebook fans consider themselves to be generally left of centre' (Bartlett et al. 2013:38).

Democratic Party candidate in the elections.³⁵⁰ On the other hand, he has sympathy for the founder of the North League, Umberto Bossi, especially for his close relation to the people and anti-centralism struggle (Angeli 2014). Along with the current North League and other parties classified as right wing extremists, the M5S leadership shares views concerning immigration and exit from the Euro. However, it does so without solid support from the M5S membership, who share opposite views on certain issues, such as immigration, than that of the M5S leadership. The first time that Casaleggio signed a post on the blog was precisely on the crime of illegality for immigrants, to defend a conservative position (Grillo and Casaleggio 2013). The ideological orientation of Casaleggio has not been the object of adequate analysis and such a focus would deserve a dedicated study. His business experience and model of social development, suggests liberal thought with a focus on social communitarian solidarity with a paternalist and conservative acceptance. It is not a coincidence that when Casaleggio gained more relevance in the political leadership (starting from 2010), the movement opened up towards the right.

Nadia, assistant of a Euro MP and former candidate herself, provides a focused insight of the position of the movement with respect to economics and the relation of the state, market and society:

The movement being neither of the left nor the right is not in itself against capitalism or is for communism. It is not for any of these things. It is for the common good, which is another thing, it is a third concept. In the sense that it is believed, in practice, to be making a synthesis, because then everyone has her own different schemes, though it is believed that there are some things – and substantially they are the five stars – that cannot be the object of the market. Because we have seen that the market is stacked. That is, the market... it is not true that it wins the demand, the offer ... but markets tend to do the cartels, which is then ally with each other and tend to make a monopoly, right?, of things and so then they virtually dictate the prices they want. All this cannot be applied to water, it cannot be applied to education, to health, to connectivity – which is important because it is a strategic infrastructure – to transport. Then, there are things on which we are absolutely against...

³⁵⁰ Closeness to the left is at the origin of the M5S. To some extents signs of sympathy remain over time, for instance, with the candidacy of Stefano Rodotà (former president of the Left Democratic Party – PDS) to the Italian presidency in 2013. Federico Pistono (M5S activist, interview) participated in the movement since the first meetup reunions (2005) and he testifies that only when the electoral result become an objective the political line switched towards a nationalist trend, without much discussion and with the disillusionment of many activists. Earlier themes were on the environment, anti-corruption, human rights, and sustainable development. Similarly, Martino and Nadia (interview) declare their delusion for the shift from a leftist political line to include also the right. More severe and accusative were the tones of Viola and Ugo (interview), who felt profoundly deluded about the political shift towards the right and they deserted the movement and accused it of political betrayal.

here it is a little of a social matrix, if you will, because then Grillo was Socialist. [...] Certainly we are not for liberalism. But I must say, knowing a little the last wave of people who entered the movement, some of the movement, say at least 20-30% of people, however believe that the presence of the state in regulating economic life, is negative, namely that the economy... because they swap this with the bureaucracy. Which is another thing, that is, the bureaucracy is used to make things difficult so then in these folds of these difficulties it can obviously insinuate corruption. [...] The bureaucracy etc., we too are in favour to make things easy, when one has got a business initiative [and can open a business in e three days instead of six months]. [...] But this does not mean being for capitalism, however, right? In a way totally liberal, savage. However, we say that the synthesis of all [this] is that some things must be controlled by the state, because they are public. [We are against] liberal capitalism, the hyper-liberal (interview Martino and Nadia).

After this last point, which corresponds to the political positions taken by the movement, the state must have a role in regulating the market and must exclude the entrance of the market in the basic common good. In other words, the market shall not have a say on the dignity of life of the people. Nadia (interview) maintains that if the M5S has an ideology that is a third sort of ideology, where the common good is based in the socialist root of Grillo and the most part in that of the older membership of the movement. The entrance of members with a right-wing orientation sharpened the struggle against bureaucracy and pro small-medium sized enterprises and against corruption whenever bureaucracy is an instrument to propagate bribery and decline the state's responsibility in the shadow of institutional manipulation.

To summarise, the post-ideology of the movement is pre-eminently political and not societal. It is an institutional and electoral discourse targeting the political homogeneity of left and right parties in adopting neoliberal policies, regardless of their declared political ideology. This discourse does not negate social ideologies but encompasses them within the movement through an experimental adoption of policy-oriented definition of the political line. It has strengthened a third ideological position which is neither left nor right but based on participation in the definition of the common good. The state should protect that participatory vision of the common good without permitting state bureaucracy to give rise to corruption. The M5S participatory ideology of the commons is still in the making together with the movement itself, in its own experimental approach.

6.4.2 Local autonomy and devolution

The degree of local autonomy and devolution of the M5S is relatively complex and innovative. The website www.meetup.com, is an instrument that favours 'weak interaction'

for the absence of strong membership and rules if compared to other organisational forms (Passarelli et al. 2013:132–33).³⁵¹ The organisation and form of interaction of activists varies in each group because there are no replicated or cloned structures, rather, each local group decides autonomously how to be organised. Different conditions apply, such as: a) the participation level in a meetup group and b) full registration to Grillo's blog, as this defines the relation between meetup groups (local) and membership in the M5S (national).³⁵² Most of the activists that participate in local meetup activities are also certified members of Grillo's blog and therefore members of the M5S, but there is no direct implication of the two. There is no obligation to be part of both. Activists can decide to participate only in the local meetup groups or exclusively via Grillo's blog as cyber activists.³⁵³ Cyber activists follow the blog's themes and initiatives and participate in the online activities through comments, decision-making (by voting in online polls) and attending public events (i.e., V-Days or 5 Star Italy). Being an activist of a meetup group, in the first place, implies to work for one's own territory and on local issues, but it also is to promote national campaigns, such as the campaign for citizens income (*reddito di cittadinanza*) or the collection of signatures to propose a referendum to exit the euro currency zone.

As seen above, meetup groups are generally not controlled, but are surely influenced, by the M5S leadership or elected representatives; however, the activities developed at the grassroots are mostly independent from the blog. 'Grillo's blog, which deals with broad issues,

³⁵¹ There exist 1279 meetup groups related to the M5S with 168.033 members in 1061 cities in 19 different countries (as of 20 October 2015, ref. http://beppegrillo.meetup.com/it/?__topic_subdomain=1). At this time the M5S has 130.000 members (users of Grillo's blog) and 1.600 elected representatives in institutions (Grillo 2015b).

³⁵² There are some important points of difference between the membership of Grillo's blog and the meetup groups. In the first place, Grillo owns, while Casaleggio Associati manages, the blog. The site meetup.com is independent (as other alternative software possibly chosen to substitute meetup.com as social media by local groups). Secondly, the former does not implement intermediate organisational official structures while the latter requires that each local group is coordinated by a number of 'organisers', 'co-organisers' and 'assistant organisers' (generally named 'staff'). The staff is granted administrative privileges and has more power, such as the ability to cancel a comment, approve events or change their title, agenda or location, and send an email to all members. With meetup.com Grillo and Casaleggio opened an independent space of proliferation for local communities and they gave them a basic infrastructure to quickly become operative. This was a key feature for the growth of the local communities and, as a consequence, of the civic lists and the M5S groups. However, the organisation of the meetup groups tends to be controlled by the most active members and this is the main source of personal and group issues.

³⁵³ Kamarck (2002) identifies the online mobilisation of politically independent individuals generated by an interest in politics as 'cybervolunteering'. In the case of the M5S this is not applicable as the individuals are politically bound, and therefore the term 'cyber activism' is more appropriate.

is not a source of primary importance for the local action. It serves for the general political line, as a factor of cohesion for militants, who consult it often. Activists have to convert everything into local initiatives' (Biorcio 2015c:22). Members generally participate in more than one group (local, provincial, regional) and the exchange of organisational experience is customary. Each community has its own dynamic but some dynamics emerge repeatedly in different communities.³⁵⁴ The inviolable freedom of self-organisation of the local groups is a strength of the movement because the local community remains in what Alberoni calls the 'movement' phase. This lasts until the institutionalisation that the movement never achieves at the local level (Alberoni 2014:24).

Meetup groups do not have formal hierarchies and are not subjugated to lobbyist interests, neither are they serving the will of the leader. Within local groups there are different identities united by the M5S collective identity that operates to moralise politics and for democratisation. The internal organisation and structure is horizontal and fluid, as strong structures are rejected as they are considered to be the form adopted by traditional parties (that the M5S opposes). There are no intermediate superstructures between the local communities and the M5S leadership, nor does city or regional coordination exist. In many cases, the elected representatives play a mediating and coordinating role between different groups, however this is not the case when the representatives dissent from the national leadership and are expelled or have decided to leave the M5S spontaneously (as in Latina). Generally, the internal structure is informal (based on a few principles and rules) and rotating (elections of the organisers take place generally every 6-12 months). The group of organisers are the most active members and they tend to attain a higher degree of influence on the group. Beyond the group of organisers, local groups can create other internal bodies such as an appeal committee, a communication group and thematic working groups.³⁵⁵ In most cases, the influence of some activists rises above the others and when they coincide with the role of

³⁵⁴ Biorcio is able to collect the characteristic of the local communities emerging from the study of the M5S in 16 different cities (Biorcio 2015c), these characteristics are overall confirmed by the ethnographic study carried out in the town of Latina. I merge Biorcio's and my analysis as follow.

³⁵⁵ Working groups carry on activities of local and national interest. For an example of how do they work for the drafting of national legislation see (Bassoli 2013).

the organisers, the logistics and political agenda are merged. Activists share tasks based on personal experience, competence, passion and personal availability.³⁵⁶

The high level of local autonomy of the meetup groups corresponds to a substantial devolution.³⁵⁷ The autonomy is held in meetup groups that organise their activities independently and is maintained within local institutions. As confirmed by Basilio and Bertoldo (M5S municipal representatives) in their interview and by the research conducted by Boffi in Milan (2015:51), elected representatives are free to pursue their political programmes, excluding the cases in which they contravene the national political line. For example, the case of the mayor of Comacchio, who applied to be a candidate to be elected in at provincial level while the M5S wants to abolish that level of administration (Zavagli 2014).

6.4.3 *Micro leadership and influence*

Biorcio (interview) affirms that Grillo wants to maintain a fluid base (unstructured) but, in the meetup groups, leaders materialise and become emerging figures, even if not elected. This is tolerated but it creates tensions, especially when it becomes a formal characteristic. The leadership within meetup groups cannot be official because the movement is leaderless by definition (Fo et al. 2013:79) and any official structuring is generally rejected by its members.³⁵⁸ However, *de facto*, some activists achieve particular visibility and become

³⁵⁶ Meetups have no fixed venue and occur in places such as bars, restaurants, activists' homes, garages or rented places. Group meetings serve to provide an alternative informative channel and to organise concrete activities to burst a culture of democratic participation. Activists are aimed at improving society and politics working at the grassroots and prioritising activities listening to the needs emerging from the bottom-up in society. Local groups include observers, irregular and regular activists that participate and identify themselves with the M5S with a higher or lower degree. Activists use the internet to get organised and sometimes to take decisions (online voting) but most of the work is done in person. Internet is also a source of personal problems between members of the group, as chat or forum discussions may quickly degenerate to form different positions and may lead to personal offence. Decisions are taken in the assembly and most of the groups adopt rules and norms that remain open to public participation but restrict the right to vote to those activists that have contributed with some continuity and involvement (measured by the duration of participation and the number of events participated in). Each group defines rules for the participation and the seniority requested for the right to vote. Vote restriction is especially adopted in case of important issues while most of the time decisions are taken by consensus after a general discussion.

³⁵⁷ Representatives are generally not involved in local groups activities, Achille (M5S senator, interview) affirms that he participates in local and regional meetup group meetings as a mere activist and Domenico (M5S senator, interview) explains that local decisions are taken by local activists who are best positioned in order to avoid lobby interests from interfering. However, Biorcio (interview) affirms that representatives may play the role of mediator in local conflicts.

³⁵⁸ The absence of an official and formal leadership complicates the coordination among different meetup groups of the same town, as observed by Boffi in Milan (2015:49), and fuels the emergence of sub-groups

points of reference within the groups. This results for one or more of the following reasons: they are more knowledgeable and prepared to talk about the political and social issues of the local or national level; they engage in more activities; they take the responsibility and lead initiatives more often than others do; they have belonged to the group for a long time and participate more; and, generally, they are more communicative.³⁵⁹ Participating more implies to be more informed about the progress of the group in the different areas. These activists have a deep sense of belonging with the movement and/or the meetup group and their participation has for them become a habit. They tend to defend their contribution to the M5S and for the local group. Meetup leaders are never declared as such but they are those people from which the orientation of the group generally depends. Their main characteristic is their capacity to influence the group without any specific set of rules that assign special rights or powers to them. Following the nomenclature adopted by Casaleggio in the context of virtual networks, and also in the nodes of the M5S physical network; ‘influencer’ – rather than leader – is a more appropriate term (Casaleggio 2008). Tullio provides an insightful description of the meetup group influencers:

Even at the local level, some people are the ones that... you see also in meetups... they are those who take the floor more often, those who are always present. And, in my opinion, also due to the split that took place [within the local group of Latina], they were singled out like the masters that show off. I noticed this also in other meetups. Actually, they are activists who get the ball rolling. Meaning that if I am present in many meetup [meetings], I participate, propose, work, discuss, what is my fault? I like it, I do it with pleasure, I do it because I believe it. But I do not want to influence anyone, it is not that I want to be the master. I propose, and then if the group comes behind me, it would be welcome. And there are some activists who have a particular ancestry, in our meetup and also in the other meetups so, you see [mentions three activists of 5SLIM], they are more active than others, they get the ball rolling. So, anyway they act as a reference. The same in the other meetup [groups], [mentions four activists of meetup group 256], maybe I too sometimes am seen as a figure to which to ask what to do. But it does not mean that I am the boss or that [names another activist] is the boss or that he decides, no. They are simply activists who work, who get the ball rolling and to whom many look like a reference. It does not mean that anyone could not do what they do. Eventually you do not have to show off, you have to work. You get the ball rolling, you roll up your sleeves and you're there to help out and tell your opinion. You propose, everybody votes... As often happens with many new people who enter, they enter in slowly, slowly propose ideas, participate and work actively, over time, working in the meetup group. Therefore, this happened at the national level in my opinion. Some of them are historical activists. Di Maio follows the movement since childhood. Ruocco of

within the same meetup, as observed by Capuzzi in Como (2015:73). These were pre-conditions leading to a meetup group split as in Latina.

³⁵⁹ With reference to the meetup group of Catania, Sampugnaro reports the label ‘authoritativeness and competence’ used by activists referring to influencers in a positive acceptance, and ‘groups or cartel’ to refer to influencers and those closer to them in a negative acceptance (Sampugnaro 2015:202)

Naples. Last Saturday I saw Vilma Moronese, since 2006 she has been fighting for the 5 Star Movement in the area of the land of fires [terra dei fuochi]. So they are people who have an ancestry, also unconscious, but it is so because they are activists. They are activists who practically dedicated their lives to the 5 stars [movement], more than us. Right now much more than us, because the 5 Star Movement is at the centre of their lives. [...] They emerge because they get the ball rolling a lot (interview Tullio).

Extremely interesting is the relationship between participation and leadership at the grassroots, as participation makes the leadership. More active members become influencers and opinion leaders. Influencers are encouraged and supported by other members to run for a role in the team of organisers, which implies that the team of organisers tends to reflect, at least partially, the group of people who, more than others, are able to influence the group.³⁶⁰ In both the meetup groups of Latina studied there is a core of eight to ten more active activists, two or three of which are the 'top influencers'.³⁶¹ Influencers are, for instance, those that people would think about in case of a candidature for the role of mayor in the next elections. Others tend to confirm their opinions (including in case of voting) with the influencers because of their knowledge and for the trust and respect they have for them. In the core group of more active activists there are one or two women however, they are not identifiable as top influencers.³⁶²

Due to the organisational and administrative power held by the organisers in defining the agenda of the meetings and their details (date, time, title and place), organisers *de facto*

³⁶⁰ Activist of Viareggio affirm that in their meetup group there does not exist a leader and that even the organiser is not necessary (Albertini 2015:111–12), the group works well united and has not experience any split (Albertini 2015:116).

³⁶¹ I use the concept of top influencer to describe the very few people (basically two or three) that are more listened to and followed in a meetup group. They are the core of the group and generally communicate more intensely than the rest of the group to prepare groups initiatives and to react to sudden events. In his preliminary study of the influence in a local community, Merton identifies the 'top' influencers as the most mentioned in the community and the 'middle' influencers as those relatively less mentioned (Merton 1968:464). He used the term influential instead of influencers and did not apply his analysis to a political community but a local one.

³⁶² In Latina, the top influencers are all men although a few women activists are also very active. Looking at the selection of candidates for the general elections of 2013 (parliamentarians), while in Latina two men and one women were the most voted, only 13% of the overall candidates were women. However, the number of women selected was 18,3% and 38% was the rate of women elected to the parliament among the M5S MPs (De Rosa 2013:132; Lanzone and Rombi 2014). This figure shows the commitment of the movement to raise the percentage of women participation and, especially, their representation within institutions.

acquire a dynamism that makes them protagonist in both the online and offline spheres.³⁶³

Here is the testimony of an organiser and top-influencer, Giacinto:

From announcing the meetup [meeting], [...] I know I can handle de facto threads as I will, or at least convene meetings more interesting to me. Without me doing that activists can... without me imposing them... Activists can propose whatever they like, but the fact is they do it almost never. And the fact that you always think about it, is anyways an orientation that you can give. It is indisputable that I can give an orientation. Trust me, that even in good faith I give it anyway, as Grillo does in the end... Of course, I do it in the most democratic way possible, however, de facto I realise that if someone would nit-pick me would say "why did you do this and not that? We talked also about the other topic you could choose that too". It is true, everything true. You never stop being too participatory and too extended in the decision (interview Giacinto).

Group dynamism needs a few people taking the initiative, and they tend to become people of political, beyond organisational, reference, that is, they become local influencer. Understanding local leadership in a movement that is against the concepts of leadership and structure, is quite demanding. In the study coordinated by Biorcio (2015a) in various Italian cities, the question of local leadership was not appropriately addressed. Each meetup group has different group dynamics and there is no rule concerning how the local leadership develops in general. To have a clearer idea of the role of the leadership I will now analyse in practice the role of the influencer in a meetup group.

In both the meetup groups of Latina, the role of the moderator and the intervention of the influencer overruns their mandate. Although this is done in different forms, in the two meetup groups there are general tendencies. The moderator does not limit herself to request the respect of the time limit or the focus on the topic. She often uses her time to express a subjective opinion on what is being discussed and tries to direct the discussion in one direction or the other. When there is enough space, activists make a circle around tables, when the number increases there may be two or more concentric circles or all chairs can be oriented towards one table: the influencers tend to be in the centre of the circle or in the central table if present. Influencers generally intervene more times and with stronger and selective references to shared values and objectives, as to provide higher moral and political arguments when there are clashes between conflicting positions in a specific debate. In case of a meeting dedicated to a new project, or in a meeting to formulate a declaration or a call for action,

³⁶³ Fornaro maintains that the organiser has a similar role to the secretary of a party section (Fornaro 2012:255).

influencers generally prepare the draft document that the meeting participants can emendate and accept.³⁶⁴ Other times, the influencers come with an opinion or form one during the debate and try to use the debate to legitimate their opinion. Although they are generally open to changing their minds, their preponderance on the debate limits the chances of others to have the same space to talk and the same amount of attention as them. When the discussions are tense, influencers tend to represent their point of view as if it is the general opinion, thereby creating the main narrative of the group. Aiming at facilitating the interaction, they respond to general questions emerging from other participants even if the responses are subjective, those responses become a structural part of the argument.

Influencers are also defined by their role in the overall activities of the meetup group. Influencers are generally regarded as the people that (unofficially) represent the whole group. For instance, they interact with the counterparts of the other meetup groups of the town in order to open a breach and solve the conflict among the groups, or on the contrary, when they are closed to dialogue the conflict is more intense. There is no clear delegation in the M5S and the role of organiser, coordinator of a working group, or any other activist that implements a decision on behalf of the group may come to be controversial. The interpretation of the mandate may be extremely subjective. These are the cases when the influencer has the feeling they interpret the will of the group without checking and passing it through the group on the specific issues.³⁶⁵ These shortcomings take place also because

³⁶⁴ This occurred more often in meetup group 256 than in meetup group 5SLIM. It is not a rule, as sometimes documents are drafted collectively online or in a physical meeting. But the group of influencers prepared the first draft independently in cases as the 'Pact for the community', during which amendments to it in January 2015 led to the two meetup groups splitting up. The project 'the citizen's corner' (June 2015) or the regulations for the electoral commission (October 2015). The amendments made to the regulation of the meetup group 256 in 2015 serves as an example of a collective drafting, although the original draft was the regulation already in place since 2013. In this case, however, the draft was circulated electronically and amendments were accepted online before the group met physically to discuss it point by point, emend it again and vote.

³⁶⁵ An example of this kind of situation emerged in June 2015, after the 5SLIM had debated on the opportunity to open a dialogue with the meetup group 256. The organiser interpreted it as a full openness and accepted the membership of some of the influencers of the meetup group 256 within the meetup group 5SLIM. This raised discontent and criticism within the meetup group 5SLIM that was not fully prepared to have those influencers accepted within the group due to the fact that the conflict with them had generated the split. Another example occurred in December 2014 when some of the members of the communication group of the meetup group 256 drafted a press release without properly consulting the whole communication group. An activist, member of the communication group, who felt the urgency and necessity to negate that the meetup group supported the resignation of the three national representatives, drafted the press release and pushed it rapidly to be publicised. However, the form chosen to communicate this decision was not deliberative and the process was criticised by other members of the communication groups and activists in general.

influencers dedicate more time to the group and aim at speeding up and concretising the work.

Giacinto (M5S activist, interview) denounces that organisers can come with an idea, convene a meeting and instrumentally orientate the collective decision towards their own idea. This kind of disaggregated leadership, where the leader is separated from the community and operate instrumentally towards the group, is deleterious to the local group in the long run, as in the case of Latina where the ‘cartel of the organisers’ was identified by many activists as a fracturing problem just before the two meetup groups split. It is a fact that the leadership of the influencers within local groups is unstructured and dynamic compared to other organisations such as parties or associations where the internal organisation reflects a more rigid structure (Biorcio 2015b:215–18).

Even if the concept of leadership applies at the local level and is more dynamic and less structured than in other organisations and political formations, the idea of leader is not applicable. In different moments of the evolution of a meetup group, different small groups of activists may assume the leadership through their capacity of influencing the group and their availability to participate. In January 2015, the meetup group 256 experienced the clash of two groups of influencers: one that was more cohesive (the group of organisers who were closer to the three national representatives); and one that was emerging (the group of those critical of the representatives and faithful to Grillo). They clashed to a point that it caused the split of the meetup group, similar to what happened in Florence (Albertini 2015:120–21; Andretta 2015:119).

6.4.4 *The M5S signifier*

In the M5S rhetoric, the ‘web’ is the supreme deciding body, the formulation of the ‘people’ that has an instrument to collect its own opinions and decide. However, the reference to the people as the people of the web is an abstraction as it standardises and unites a patchwork (Dal Lago 2013 Cap VII). The reference to the web as ‘the web will decide’³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ The ‘web’ of the M5S includes those netizens who register to Grillo’s blog (now the M5S operating system or Rousseau) and who’s registration has been certified by the M5S staff (at around 130.000 in October 2015) (Grillo 2015b). The participation to online voting generally includes just a percentage of the right holders, this percentage diminished over time from 60% to 20%. Although certified membership grew (from 31.612 in

presents the internet as a free space, which, as seen above, is not the case because people have different access and possibilities to engage in the internet. Biancalana (2014) maintains that the use of the internet is a populist resource for the M5S because it is an instrument of manipulation by the leader leading to a plebiscitary democracy and also because it engenders a positive rhetoric for the redemption of democracy.³⁶⁷

The history of the M5S is rooted in Grillo's social and political campaigns as a comedian, then his personal blog, the meetups, civic list and eventually the movement. Generally, a blog is the artefact where the voice of the author, open to criticism and suggestions, performs a collecting function, followers are interested in the topics discussed. The number of visits, the tone of the comments and the attention acquired in the blogosphere, give to the blogger a sense of his fellowship. So was the case of Grillo, the prestige of his position and the way its communication was designed over time, gave him the privilege of the 'net sentiment',³⁶⁸ which is the capacity to know what the network users want, that is, their preference. Leone (M5S MP) explains the extension of the net sentiment to those who inhabit the M5S network and acts as spokesperson of the people of the web. When asked about the concerned procedures and e-democracy tools adopted by the M5S representatives to maintain the connection with the base of activists, the answer was:

It is a continuous cycle. Being often on social [networks], we have the feedback. [...] We were born on the web. [...] The web self-regulates itself. I'll give you a silly example,

December 2012 to 87.656 in December 2014). As a result, the 'people of the web' for the M5S is on average represented by around 20-30.000 people (Mosca 2015:43-44).

³⁶⁷ Biancalana sees that the structure, procedure and rules of the M5S is a pejorative form of what Jeffery Green denotes as 'plebiscitary democracy', indeed 'plebiscitary democracy is occasionally treated as a synonym for direct democracy' (Green 2010:122). The pejorative acceptance of plebiscitary democracy is characterised by 'the mediatization of political communication, the personalization of political power, the discretion of leadership, [...] the creative power of the leader vis-à-vis public opinion and the popular will' and where the people's voice 'is rendered superficial and to a large degree fictive' (Green 2010:125). Green acknowledges these arguments as descriptive but rejects to recognise that they are prescriptive and defend a positive connotation of plebiscitary democracy. He defends the ethical component of plebiscitary democracy that is based on the 'sight' (the 'gaze' and the 'candor') as opposed to the voice (of deliberation). The political power is located in the leader rather than in the law (or regulations) and have their public under the scrutiny of the people (gaze). The people controls the condition of publicity of their leaders (candor). The critiques received by the M5S connote its democratic form with the pejorative reading of plebiscitary democracy because the 'voice' (as opposed to 'sight'), expressed with comments, group meetings, participation, deliberation, is still central to the M5S model although rendered superficial with regards to main political decisions.

³⁶⁸ Interviewees refer to 'the spirit of the movement' or 'original spirit' (i.e., in the interview of Oscar) to identify the spirit of the community at the local level which decides collectively topics and issues of concern. The net sentiment is the spirit of the community of the blog.

sometimes I did maybe something resounding, I had some feedback. Sometimes I made some blunders, errors of communication, I was massacred. Sometimes I did something beautiful, I was praised. Thus you have the net sentiment. So, as a movement you have got it. For example, on very right things, we have decidedly chosen a direction, people understood (interview Leone).

The net sentiment is an unspoken authority, which gives the leadership the capacity to act in conformity with the will of the group. This implies that there is a blurred (if any) distinction between the opinion of Grillo (and Casaleggio) and the official position of the movement. There is no structured concept of 'net sentiment' implemented through a transparent procedure, as it is, rather, the custom. Grillo is the leader that attracted his fellowship and he is able to summarise the 'democratic demands' and formulate the 'empty signifier' of the M5S community, as explained by Laclau (2005a). Interviews show that the original documents³⁶⁹ drafted by Grillo and Casaleggio by simply collecting the 'voices' of the blog, although not deliberated, are felt as a collective and participatory exercise. Folco (M5S activist) identifies that in the years 2005-2009 the constitutive phase where Grillo defined the topics acknowledging themes coming from the community of his fellows. At the end of such a period, the charter of Florence and the M5S programme were welcomed as a mere summary of the 'sentiment' of the community.³⁷⁰ Martino (interview), assumes that she contributed to the drafting of the M5S programme through her comments in the blog and participation in the local meetup debates on the area of internet connection and information, which is her area of expertise. She argues that the social and political struggles of local groups, their live action, their debates, online comment (with the prevalence of those more read and more responded), has been the base for the topics of Grillo's portal and then the M5S movement. Listening to the meetup communities, the national leadership has incorporated the most debated topics, as well as topics connected to them and debated outside the movement's

³⁶⁹ The Florence charter (Grillo and Casaleggio 2009), the programme (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009b) and the non-statute (Movimento 5 Stelle 2009a).

³⁷⁰ For Bordignon the ability to catch the net sentiment is the result of a double exclusion of the two founders. 'I think the duo Grillo-Casaleggio sums antagonism and even personal resentment of two excluded in two different ways. One from public TV and the other from the world of publicly-controlled corporations. And it's interesting from the point of view of interpretation, as the role of outsiders, drop-out, Grillo and Casaleggio somehow coupled perfectly with the logic of going to interpret all those losers, excluded, the drop-out we were talking about above in relation to more general topics concerning the labour market rather than the dynamics of globalisation' (interview Fabio Bordignon). For Grillo the 'taste of removal' started in 1986 when he was expelled from the public television and became an 'excluded by profession'. Pippo Baudo was the anchor-person of the TV programme 'Fantastico' where he worked at the time of the expulsion, he confirms that he offered him many working opportunities over time, all were rejected (Mazza 2012, 2013; Scanzi 2012:94-95).

network. Eventually, the programme was a patchwork of issues that were consensual. However, Martino laments that after the creation of the movement and the launch of the programme this process has been stopped. Oscar (M5S senator) reviews the experience:

When, the political program of six years ago was created [2009], there had been a moment of rough debate, old-fashioned, but it could be a great experiment for the time, in which were aggregated a series of proposals from the blog, the forum part of the blog, and it was constituted a program. Then with additions that may have come from Casaleggio, from Grillo or from others. But basically the core of the program saw a kind of embryonic participation. With the hope that such embryonic participation then could materialise into something serious when there would be a well done portal [for e-democracy]. [...] Honestly, I saw a part of the debate. It was a mess but at least you could see the proposals made, and then I found something as a synthetic point. One could do so much more surely, however, let us say that as the first experiment I could accept it (interview Oscar).

There are two weaknesses in the missed concretisation of Grillo's net sentiment in a more mature form of e-democracy. On the one hand, with increasing electoral success the M5S leadership is accused of having stopped listening to the net sentiment emerging from the local communities and online activists of the movement. On the other hand, until 2009 the M5S has not had to face the impact of institutionalisation and electoral politics. The movement was still defining itself and defining its political line. Oscar maintains that the M5S programme does not touch upon international politics and industrial politics, therefore the first programme of the movement should be developed. This is still happening, but it seems that the recourse to collective intelligence is limited now. Net sentiment is controlled by the leadership, and they could enhance the communication on these issues potentiating e-democracy, but they do it cautiously to reduce conflicts and increase political unity. Therefore, political decisions are generally left with representatives who are invited to use their 'net sentiment' to comply with the M5S general will.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ Samuele (M5S regional representative, interview) has a different progressive vision that implies the involvement of potentially everyone to decide on anything but recognises the preoccupations of Casaleggio who envisages raising a participatory democratic conscientiousness before taking steps forward. Nadia and Romeo (activist interviews) hypothesises that Casaleggio fears to lose control over the movement with such participatory infrastructure but Samuele does recognise that the M5S in 2015 is still immature to gain complete independence from the supervision of Grillo and Casaleggio on these topics and thereby she justifies the role of the leadership. Assuming that the M5S leadership is not just manipulative but their democratic objectives are inspired by their rhetoric, both hypotheses can be simultaneously true. On the one hand, e-democracy needs a political culture to increase democratic participation without such culture the e-democratic community faces a number of challenges including: dispersion of energies, empty and endless discussions lacking of political focus, personalisation of problems and interpersonal and inter-group conflicts and the disaggregation of the political union through recurrence of groups splitting.

One of the successes of the M5S e-democracy model is to experiment with these challenges and shed light on the need of creating a participatory culture able to handle them. The conflicts of the local clusters show that negative dynamics are recurrent and the leadership may well want to avoid losing control on the same issues at the national level. On the other hand, the leadership itself is not able to implement procedures, customs and instruments of participatory democracy (or have not yet discovered them), that relieve itself from the preoccupation of losing control over the movement or that the M5S can self-undermine its political potential as it has in several local constituencies. They proclaim the primacy of leaderlessness but they have so far proved unable to make the movement fully participatory. In other words, if the M5S is not yet ready for the full implementation of participatory democracy, nor are the M5S leaders ready to be the real guarantors of a really participatory democratic project.

For Laclau (2005a) the ‘empty signifier’ is the broad category within which different democratic demands find place under the same political symbol. For their activists and sympathisers, Grillo (and Casaleggio) represent the struggle against the exclusion produced by a corrupt political system. This struggle is felt and done in different forms and through different themes by people in diverse situations, who find in the empty signifier communicated by Grillo a pregnant identification (Laclau 2005a:82 and 105). The five stars are empty signifiers (Greblo 2011:81–85) ascribable to the basic need of inclusion by the common people who therefore demand democracy in the management of water, environment, transportation, connectivity and development. The overall demand is democracy to penetrate social and public concerns. The appeal of the M5S is primarily to those that feel external to the ‘caste’, the elite or the establishment, including its political, economic and media dimensions. The M5S unites different social, economic and political demands under the original five stars. Shortly before officially announcing the creation of the M5S Grillo affirmed ‘[t]he Movement is the voice of millions of people who have no voice in the TV News, or in TV, but they will be the voice of the Italy of tomorrow’ (Grillo 2009a). The empty signifiers of the movement releases the pressure on obscure manoeuvres without discharging them, however, without substantial evidence, those manoeuvres remain mere speculation.

7 Comparative analysis and conclusions

As stated throughout this study, the comparison between the cases of the AAP and the M5S is not a systematic contraposition of two diverse political phenomena in two very dissimilar contexts (India and Italy). Carrying out such an exercise would require a different kind of approach and would lead to diverse analytical conclusions. The objective of this study is to investigate the theory on democratisation, in light of a theoretical framework based on Gandhi's civilisational perspective and the epistemologies of the South, and the innovation emerging from empirical cases centred on party-movements such as the AAP and the M5S. The study itself represents an 'intercultural translation' among these theories and the empirical cases, a critical non-symmetrical approach to the empirical cases in dialogue with the theoretical framework. I focus on the innovation and flows of each of the party-movements in view of the theory of democratisation emerging from the theoretical framework based on Gandhi's thinking and in light of the epistemologies of the South. In the following pages, I start by analysing the interaction between theory and empirical findings. In the following two parts, I then engage with the AAP and the M5S in a detailed comparative analysis that is divided into two sub chapters. Finally, I propose overall concluding remarks responding to the thesis questions and verifying the hypothesis that was elaborated on in the contextualisation chapter.

7.1 Thick theory, thin practice

By definition, the destiny of any theory of democracy and democratisation is to be incorporated into incomplete social and political practice. This holds true more so when the theoretical framework is as rich as the one proposed above, where the civilisational perspective provided by Gandhi for an alternative democratic organisation and worldview is complemented with the sociological approach of the epistemologies of the South. Gandhi did not restrict his role to the theoretical or political direction of the democratisation he envisaged, as on the contrary, his theory emerged from his lived and controversial experience in various social struggles. Santos is also engaged with social movements on the ground, as he is a scholar-activist and through experience he collects evidence to substantiate his theoretical framework. What was more challenging in this research was the fact that these two authors did not engage at the grassroots with the case studies chosen, even though Gandhi is the

reference of one of them and Santos studies both of them. In this section, I analyse the impact of the empirical findings on the theoretical framework, convinced that a social and political theory is relevant as far as it dialogues and learns from the evidence on the ground. For the theoretical framework chosen, the empirical cases are both internal and external tests and sources of information.

It is too late to struggle for Gandhi's democratisation. India was the potential champion of a civilisational model of democracy that lost the cultural struggle against the liberal democratic paradigm due to a mix of historical, social, political and economic reasons. Gandhi struggled against a colonial empire, a colonising mind-set, and internal communal, caste, classist, racist and political divisions in order to propose a political philosophy that was able to overcome the root inadequacy of Western liberal thought, its possessive individualism and the predominant role of the market over social relations. His notion of democracy bridged Indian and Western knowledge in search of an anthropological philosophy that was able to cope with the complexity of the human being in relation with the self and with the other as alien. Due to the ambition of such a democratic project, the lead of Gandhi was essential to enforce such a project in socio-political experimentation. With his assassination, the charisma of such a proposal was dispersed and his top followers only had a limited and partial authority to carry on the various struggles of their master. As a result, the message of the Mahatma remains largely lacking of experience in the post-colonial domestic context because it was not experimented in a political regime.

Gandhi left behind a variety of lessons at different levels that would be impossible to tackle in a condensed work such as the present one. This dissertation aims to show that democratisation in Gandhi's perspective is potentially unlimited. This is as it is characterised by the paradigmatic equilibrium of the *purusharthas* or purposes of life (ethic, wealth, passion and liberation), a fruitful interaction of individual and society, that are both aimed at the achievement of *swaraj* or self-rule. These are a political re-formulation of the ontology and relation between ends and means – based on the primacy of truth and non-violence – and provide innovative democratic ambition and unprecedented forms and methods of power holding and struggle. This rich and ambitious approach tackles possessive individualism, the

anthropological root of the three forms of oppression that are opposed by the epistemologies of the South: colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

If Gandhi's democratisation is a utopian landscape, although contested and criticised (as described above), Gandhian democratisations are fully possible. This is especially the case with social movements that take up one or more of Gandhi's several struggles in order to improve or provoke the alteration of the liberal democratic regime. Not only have the social activists Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan taken up Gandhi's struggles, but many others have as well. Social actors that take up Gandhi's struggles for democratisation engage with new experimentalism and grassroots practice. I believe that this is directly the case for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and indirectly the case for the 5 Star Movement (M5S). Although with contradictions, these two party-movements have the merit to enhance the discursive democratisation perspective beyond political-colonialism in line with some of Gandhi's democratisation perspectives. They especially touch upon the state-civil society divide, the bottom-up participatory approach, the ideological position that has emerged with Western modernity, the issue of leadership and its horizontality and the incorporation of an experimentalism that must include innovations evolving from the bottom-up.

Gandhian democratisation starts from the bottom. A politician in the Gandhian perspective considers herself as a social worker experiencing the political-colonial regime from the inside and with a vision for her fellows, uniting them for the common interest. Here, democracy re-joins politics and humanism, as its focus comes back to the personal and community dimensions. People are alienated by political issues that concern themselves if they are convinced that these issues are abstract and alien and are without the possibility to be amended by them. On the contrary, they get engaged when social and political issues are close to their lives and they feel they can have a say in them. The oceanic circles, that is, the scalar dimension of democracy from the individual, local, regional and national community, involve citizens in relevant concerns.

The theoretical section of this thesis has elaborated on political-colonialism as a system of political segregation of power elites from society that generates and radicalises social exclusion. The political crisis experienced by liberal democratic regimes is an epiphenomenon of the political-colonial *status quo* in these regimes and is rooted in the liberal

rather than the democratic pillar of this type of regime. When scholars refer to the political crisis, *de facto* they are pointing to the outcome of at a stable characteristic of the modern version of this regime type, a structural dimension of which the crisis is just an outcome. In other words, either liberal democratic regimes have always been in crisis or the crisis – although experienced with different intensities – is part of their working condition. To this extent, referring to the political crisis (or the crisis of liberalism), or to political-colonialism, is a similar reference to a structural flaw. The form of the state and politics, centred on elections and representation is a large critique that generates: a lack of accountability of the political establishment, a denial of the request for political participation, a raising of doubts about the role of political parties and political apathy among the citizenry (Santos and Avritzer 2005; Mair 2002).

The representative system legitimises the political abyssal line with its centrality in defining the rigid divide between those who represent and those who are represented – besides the possibility of opting for one or the other existing political formations in elections. In the complex and inter-structural realm of politics, the political abyssal line reduces the political to the institutional, silencing or co-opting voices beyond institutional representation. The external influence of global actors plays a substantial role in the polarisation of the political-colonial divide within the domestic democratic domain. Liberal democracy, instead of defending the sovereignty of the people, provides a privileged space to the elite so it can overrule the democratic foundations of domestic societies. The impact of neoliberal political strategies is often more influential than those of the local, regional, national and international (e.g., EU) strategies of wider societies involved. The fact that liberal democracy as a system is able to accommodate those demands implies that it also accommodates this kind of colonial regime. The example of big infrastructural mega-projects or extractivist activities, of which multinational corporations are major beneficiaries, shows the flagrant rupture between the two sides of the line as these projects are generally planned without proper consultation and participation from the bottom up. More subtle forms of political exclusion include the reduction of access to labour or the expansion of the domain of the market into essential domains such as health, education, security, and access to basic goods and services that are necessary for a good livelihood. This has an impact as it places the market in a position of

control over people's lives and livelihood. However, the social structure of the market is not regulated by a democratic regime that is considered external to the political sphere. Consequently, people depend on social power relations, normativity and epistemology of the market that they cannot control and that the state keeps separate.

The elite is the guarantor of that artificial concept of the people expressed by neoliberal interests, including the definition of life spaces, timing, forms of being and so on, as it is congenial to the interests coming from national and international neoliberal enterprises, of which mafias are just one part. With the abyssal logic, political-colonial regimes demote to the informal sector the political emergences of alternatives and regulate social inequalities with their economic and financial instruments. These dynamics particularly take place in the periphery of the world-system and are seen through external debt and structural and economic stabilisation (cfr. Santos 2004:353–54). The incapacity of the elite, or the part of the elite that are internally searching for an alternative to political-colonialism, to forbid this kind of enterprise to take place is also a manifestation that the political-colonialism has a systemic dimension that exceeds the coloniser itself and is inscribed in the neoliberal project. The same has happened in historical colonialism, where a nation that did not take part in the colonial enterprise would risk its own national safety due to the strength acquired by its neighbours profiting of the colonial enterprise.

Combining the increasing influence of non-state actors with the reduction of state regulatory capacity, political-colonial rule is achieving an unprecedented level of social fascism, which was explored above in the theoretical section. The state is unable to preserve the conditions of humanity while for the market humanity cannot be a condition because it is not recognised as an added value. In these circumstances radical exclusions are structural. Party-movements target the root political dispossession that makes these exclusions possible by offering a space of interaction and decision making at the base. The more the side of the elite is restricted, the more intense is colonialism, the wider the zone of sharing is, the greater the democratisation. Indeed, social fascism represents an illiberal rule of law(lessness), as it co-exists with liberal-democratic regimes where the law exists but the power of the state to apply it equally is both reduced by: 1 – the increasing prevalence of private actors; and 2 – by being politically limited to zones considered 'civilised' and excluded in zones of the new 'state

of nature'. The 'political abyssal line' is the line of political-colonial regimes that divides the interests (actions and decisions) of the elite (politicians, opinion leaders and neoliberal managers) from wider society, while in theory the former should be a mirror of the latter.

Between the two sides of the line an uneven interaction can take the form of invitational co-optation or assimilation of political ideas and marginalisation and negation of political alternatives. Movements of the political abyssal line occur through revolutions or reforms. In the first case, these are abrupt and disarming, while in the second case, they are progressive and mediated. In this study I empirically investigated movements of the line provided by party-movements. These are reformist in that they enter the system to change it, as they aim at a cultural revolution, or an epistemological revolution concerning the theory of democratisation. For their challenging positions and structure, the AAP and the M5S discourses are privileged spaces to understand the limit of liberal democratic regimes because they expose it to sever criticism and provide space for alternative thinking. They are controversial and embryonic political projects that inevitably include contradictions, even though questionably in a higher degree with respect to more mature political enterprises.

Political liberalism frames the state's institutions as a formal organisation restricted to public life of the citizen's domain. It is unable and unwilling to grasp the interplay of this main sphere of politics with the other five social structures relegated to private or public non-political life. People living in liberal democratic regimes; belong to families and other intimate networks of relationships, are involved in professional environments, are implicated in the logic of the market, pertain to communities (ethnic, cultural, social and so on) and, last but not least, experience increasingly globalised international relations. While liberal theorists box the political impact of these social structures behind the 'veil of ignorance' (Rawls 1999), social structures have their 'informal' or 'private' politics (or power forms), law and epistemology. They interplay with the state's politics, law and science and produce blurred frameworks where the border between public politics and private relations (or civil society space) is indefinite and indefinable.

In liberal democratic regimes, democracy is an accident of non-citizen social structures. Gandhi understood this and attempted to subvert the political-colonial segregation of democracy with an embracing concept of democracy as *swaraj*, or self-rule,

where all the structures of social life could interplay in the practice of democracy. For this reason, he fostered a concept of democracy radically centred on the community and on duties or service. Party-movements do not achieve such a structural effort, but they make an attempt to refocus the political sphere not only in the citizen's social structure but also in other social structures, especially the market and community as it emerges from the struggles in which they are engaged. As any other grassroots democratic movement, party-movements engage in a wider debate about participation and the penetration of democracy into different social structures. Moreover, they attempt to reverse the domination of the citizen social structure over the other structures, with the amplification of the democratic processes emerging in other social structures within the institutions.

Liberal democracy (and its notion of modernity) fails to entitle a political responsibility with a wide picture of the life of those represented. A regime cannot merely decide on such complexity with a pure representative system centred on the citizen social structure. Participation from below and interaction between the representative and the represented, along with accountability and transparency, are conditions *sine qua non* of more democratic political regimes. Engaging citizens in political party-movements re-politicises social relations that are considered neutral, private or technical by political-colonialism. They tend to amplify these political dimensions and therefore widen the application of democratic principles. In doing so, they also expand the domain of action and increase the possibility of incurring in shortcomings and mistakes. For this reason then, they must be critically assessed.

Political successes condemn party-movements to have to face severe public scrutiny with attentive media coverage and critical academic analysis. The scrutiny of their actions and decisions is amplified, and this is especially true of their mistakes. This amplification however, does not justify the mistakes themselves just as it does not justify the excess in reporting them either.

Media attention is also an instrument exploited by the party-movements in order to spread their performances. Even the initial avoidance of participating in TV shows by the M5S, when their electoral success was already substantial, was a performance that increased curiosity and attention towards the party-movement. Casaleggio Associati is an internet marketing company and Gianroberto Casaleggio had the visionary project to break the

political format with an (initially) political outsider and later a political competitor such as Beppe Grillo. A factor of innovation by the M5S is that the leaders of the party-movement do not engage directly in the political sphere and while one of them – Grillo – is the face of the movement, the other – Casaleggio – remained on the backstage as did his son Davide. This articulation of the leadership, serendipity for the system, makes the party-movement internally more cohesive and consistent and externally more smarmy and difficult to oppose politically. The AAP has also fostered its own media image with the professionalism of journalists and media experts adopting a more traditional approach to the use of the media. As a carnival, India is a fertile land for political plurality that may turn into a baroque introducing paradigmatic changes, something that Gandhi attempted. The AAP directly link to Gandhi's civilisational vision, but its centrifugal force appears to render it unable to uphold Gandhi's immense civilisational perspective.³⁷²

The comparison that was presented in this study shows that the AAP and the M5S, although rightly targeted by criticism in many aspects, are able to include the people as a marginalised category, that is, they characterise 'the people' from the margin. However, the margin is not a static category that is all-encompassing. It includes in itself the same logic of exclusion that it opposes. It does not exist as a single but within many margins and the differences within these margins can be more easily caught in the comparison. The abyssal line, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, investigate the margin and avoid taking it (the margin, the South, the periphery) as a consolidated unit, thereby avoiding the disregard of the reformation of marginal hegemonies. The margins in India and Italy overlap greatly (i.e., poverty, unemployment, corruption, gender discrimination, patriarchy,

³⁷² As an example of carnivalesque performance, Chatterjee (2011:20) refers to the use of theatrical methods adopted in the squatter settlement by *Shiv Sena*, the Hindu right wing nationalist party, that uses the paternalist figure of the strong man to regulate disputes, along with the use of violence when necessary, although quite rarely. This performance takes place in the informal political relations of political society. The AAP's controversial Bharti case is a similar performance, where the minister was the elected representative of the constituency and used his media preponderance to upscale paternalism as a legitimate political practice. The performance was instrumental for the AAP to send out a moral message (paternalism against prostitutes and political commitment with the local community) and to send out a challenge to the central government to award the full statehood of Delhi, so that the AAP government could control the police. For this reason after the case Kejriwal sat in *dharna*, a form of non-violent sit-in protest to advance a political-moral demand. This example demonstrates the failure to comply with the consistency between ends and means, a basic feature of Gandhi's civilisational message, but one that does also put forward a carnivalesque attempt with its centrifugal imagination.

sexism, geographical divide, racism). However, the marginalities present a unique complexity in India, where the peripheral space is expanded by communalism, caste discrimination, extreme poverty and a more composite interplay of linguistic and cultural communities. As a result, the AAP and the M5S respond with different consistency to the shift of the political abyssal line.

The critical approach of the empirical part of this study avoided constructing a romantic idea of party-movements, as while they attempt to innovate in the struggle against political-colonialism, this does not imply that they represent a solid alternative. Introducing the baroque and carnival at the end of the theoretical part, I intended to highlight the non-paradigmatic alternative created by party-movements because they are working within the system in order to subvert it from the inside. Party-movements attempt to resist the democratic deviations of the system, such as elitism and corruption, as they engage in participatory practices in search of higher intensity democracy. Despite these attempts, they still run into the downfall of exclusion. The expulsions that the AAP and the M5S adopted and the increasing centralism of their leadership are the epiphenomenon of exclusionary decision making taken by both party-movements. With the language of the epistemologies of the South, these party-movements slightly move the political abyssal line with their provisions against political-colonialism and their pro participatory and decentralised political culture. However, the movement is not tectonic, as it still entails exclusion. For example, the controversial relationship of the AAP with the *Dalits*, with its inclusive discourse void of concrete measures to deal with the issue, or the M5S' attempt to transform migration into a non-ideological issue related to institutional organisation, it leave open the abyssal logic of exclusion.

Why do they not embrace more courageous post-abysal political actions? The reason seems to stand in their hybrid political form. As a movement they can advocate a change that as a party may even be counter-productive producing loss of electoral support. This may be the case for the AAP if it would candidate a *Dalit* from a non-*Dalit* constituency. In the case of the M5S, if they were more apologetic towards an audacious position in favour of migrants this would result in a loss of the support from their right-wing sympathisers thereby contracting their electoral base.

Party-movements increase political inclusion but they are structurally unable to undermine the exclusionary character of political-colonialism as far as they have to compete in the electoral system that is regulated by the political-colonial logic. In this sense, they are the 'safety valve' of the political system while critics from the left argue that in this way they support the system. The present analysis acknowledges that party-movements have an uncertain future but it does not prove that they support the system they want to turn upside-down. Critically assessing their political performances so far, we can see an objective attempt to bring the political system to its limits. They are however, still far from questioning those limits in a structural way because the abyssal logic of political-colonialism fights back and regains lost territory. This is why party-movements so far represent a carnivalesque laughter but do not characterise a baroque action able to question the political paradigm.

Gandhi's civilisational vision of democracy undermines political-colonialism at different levels, including the philosophical, social and political. Party-movements engage in society and enter the existing political framework instead of propounding an alternative. Gandhi holistically worked at the level of the community, with an anthropological and ecological vision of an alternative social, political, economic and moral model of society. Party-movements are superficial in their attempt to amend the system. The terminology of the epistemologies of the South comes in support of their argument. While Gandhi targeted the three forms of exclusion generated by colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy, party-movements tackle political-colonialism which is a dimension of one of the three forms of oppression. The interplay of the three forms of oppression strengthen abyssal thinking which therefore must be opposed by a collective subaltern cosmopolitan effort (as was described in the theoretical part), in which party-movements have a much more powerful potential if they combine their engagement in inter- and intra-cultural translations with other subaltern forces.

7.2 Comparative appreciations of the AAP and the M5S

In the contextualisation and empirical chapters, I analysed the origin of the AAP and the M5S, they both emerged in the transition of the party system in India and Italy respectively. As seen above, in both countries the re-arrangement of power among party elites and their consequent influence on the level of conflict and fragmentation, combined

with the rising publicity of corruption scandals and the impact of neoliberal politics, opened up a space for the emergence of these socio-political actors.

Among the main points in common between the AAP and the M5S, is their emergence from civil society, through a charismatic public renowned figure of socio-political prestige, that being the sober social-activist Kejriwal for the APP and the histrionic art-activist Grillo for the M5S. The transition from civil society to state institutions took place in different latencies. The M5S emerged through a longer timeframe (between 2005 and 2009) and with a greater level of spontaneity with the use of the meetup social network and a focus on social-activism. Differing from the M5S, the AAP emerged from a direct call to political engagement. Both movements emerged as a result of temporal and geographical progressions that led to their electoral success; this process took over four years for the M5S to emerge compared to just one year for the AAP. These also emerged with different geographical intensities - in Delhi and a few other Indian states for the AAP and all-over Italy for the M5S. As a consequence, the group of Italian research participants include a higher and varied number of representatives at all administrative levels. This resulted³⁷³ in the kind of evidence that was collected qualitatively in Italy differing from that which was collected in India where the focus was both on the AAP as well as on Gandhian activism. This analysis has benefited from the diversity of the qualitative data collected, firstly, because of the South-North comparison and secondly from the engagement with party-movements in different social, cultural and political contexts. The sociological inquiry engages with the points of difference but always departed from the common challenge or common response the party-movements provided to political-colonialism. The following paragraph analyse those challenges.

The AAP and the M5S reacted to a crisis of the traditional party system with a response from below, a discursive moral stance drafted from the bottom-up and draped around the social prestige of two respected leaders. While both movements emerged from centralised initiatives, they are based on the volunteer engagement of citizens whom possess a renewed political hope that brings the party-movements to the fore of electoral success.

³⁷³ The fact that the M5S has had a relatively longer history than the AAP and the fact that it rejects a mainstream party structure, justifies its stronger focus on party organisation. As analysed in chapter six, the timeframe of the research provided richer data concerning the institutionalisation of party-movements in the case of the M5S compared to that of the AAP.

The AAP was planned as a party by a core group of social activists headed by Kejriwal, and people aggregated to the project which was already shaped in the party framework. The M5S meanwhile, became a party along the way. This led to the different structures possessed among the two, with the AAP being organised hierarchically while the M5S, besides having a central leadership and an increasing level of organisation at all administrative levels (from the local to the European), endures the claim of being an unstructured horizontal organisation. These two party-movements want to change the system each by adopting its own political form; the AAP privileging the symbolism and structure of a party with its leader in the political forefront and the M5S prioritising the symbolism and informal organisation of the movement with its leader as noble guarantor.

The AAP's and the M5S's carnivalesque discourse appear in the paradigmatic challenge to the hegemony of liberal democratic regimes as political-colonialism. The vision booklet of the AAP reaffirms the anti-colonial critic of the liberal democratic regime that Gandhi initiated in *Hind Swaraj* by questioning if freedom fighters 'sacrifice their lives so that our own people should plunder the country instead of the British?' (Aam Aadmi Party 2012:1). The AAP within the discursive renovation of the democratic theory takes the subversion of political-colonialism as the system of domination linked to historical colonialism. The M5S advocates the subversion of the political and party system and for that it is defined as 'anti-political', embracing a similar discursive position with the AAP. However, the cultural difference is clear. Gandhi himself referred to Italian independence from the Austrians to explain the difference between real self-rule – or *swaraj* – of the people and the political regime under which people are colonised by a national or foreign ruler (Gandhi 1938 Chap. XV). Gandhi clarified that there is a civilisational homogeneity between Austria and Italy and insisted on the Indian civilisational difference. This is the point discursively taken up by the AAP and absent in the M5S.

The AAP formulates an external critique to Western-centric liberal democratic theory while the M5S remains within that theory. However, they both advocate a systemic change establishing an internal-eternal dialogue, through the proposed analytical categorisation of Gandhian democratisation, concerning the democratisation potential of participation. The criticism from the external (AAP) and internal (M5S) returns evidence that tackles the political-

colonial *status quo* from two perspectives. The external criticism is a powerful instrument of renovation because it sits higher up the democratic standard and radicalises democracy from an anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist perspective. The AAP's ideological position, however, is to tackle capitalism in its crony excesses, not *per se*. The issue of patriarchy is more complex and certainly demands a wider space of inquiry. The AAP brings in issues of democracy, corruption, organisation of the state, relationship of the parties with the people, decentralisation and communities. These elements echo the main issues promoted by the M5S and its internal criticism to liberal democracy. In this way, the intercultural party-movement comparison highlights cross-cultural issues related to political-colonialism.

There are two main forms in which the AAP and the M5S bring citizens within the state. The first is allowing citizens to run for candidates and the second is the re-organisation of the relationship between representatives and the represented. Party-movements make the election a participatory experience and they conquer the political symbolic imaginary propounding high moral standards and procedures in politics. By renewing the political establishment they aim at the de-mystification of governance and giving greater say to the common people. Both movements consistently implement participatory processes to select their candidates and electoral programmes, attempting to bring 'common' and committed people (with clean criminal records) into institutions.³⁷⁴ The AAP fosters civil society and the involvement of renowned activists while the M5S selects candidates directly from its grassroots clusters which may include renowned social activists as well as fresh activists and professionals. There is a higher degree of freedom within the M5S clusters to set their selection procedures compared to the party-structured directive of the AAP.³⁷⁵ In their pre-

³⁷⁴ The M5S' 163 MPs elected in 2013 are the biggest group of new faces ever seen by the Italian parliament (no other party received such massive support in its first election). Likewise, the M5S has brought a new political class in all administrative levels in which it runs for elections with fresh and new faces. The more the M5S makes electoral experiences, the more its candidate selection procedure becomes structured and stable coming closer to the AAP's centralised procedures. Initially, and to some extents until now, the procedure was completely free at the local and regional level where each group could define its selection procedure. This is for instance what happened in 2015 in the city of Latina but not in the biggest centres such as Rome, where the selection went through the M5S operating system. In cases of local conflict, the e-democracy system of the M5S also serves as a space of conflict resolution between competing candidates and groups. The drafting of collective electoral programmes is a standard procedure for the M5S at the local level while at the national level it is less fluid with a centralising role of the national elite.

³⁷⁵ Creating a new group of politicians, party-movements produces two outcomes. On the one hand, party-movements representatives substitute the political elite. On the other hand, unexperienced

electoral participation procedures, the AAP and the M5S both capture a radical, although subtle, form of exclusion proper of political-colonialism that alienates people from the political sphere. Those who defined themselves being un-politicised, were those alien to a specific form of politics but were looking forward to a different political form where they could integrate themselves. '[C]itizen disengagement applies only to politics as usual, when no change seems available in the face of an intolerable, unjust socioeconomic situation' (Santos 2015b). Democratic theory here gains evidence: the political abyssal line excludes people from politics by alienating them from the political system, but people who are interested in politics simply reject politics as it is regulated by political-colonialism. The power-centralism of political-colonialism pushes away Gandhian social activists as it did for Gandhi himself.

Participation is a core objective of the AAP and the M5S and is their strongest point of contact with Gandhi's perspective. However, the two party-movements approach its introduction differently with the AAP mainly concentrated at the normative level while the M5S strengthens and urges normative intervention and fosters e-democracy innovation (and criticism).

The political discourse of the AAP is *swaraj* and the organisation of local political units (neighbourhood and village). The AAP contextualises Gandhi's proposal (1962) and attempts to reconcile contemporary urban society with the Mahatma's decentralised project. The data collected in the field shows that the AAP's aims at the introduction of the innovation through legislation and governmental actions. The 'Delhi swaraj act' is the legislative instrument that the AAP was ready to introduce in 2014 although the fall of its government stopped the process from being completed. This legislation is progressive if compared with the existing *panchayati raj* and brings with it the bottom-up perspective that the *panchayati raj* has neglected. In the AAP's discourse, *swaraj* shall slowly bring about social equality regardless of religion, caste and gender; however, this is a controversial issue in India where participation and tradition relate to oppression and communal feudalism. The AAP's urban approach is a

representatives constitute a formal-procedural weakness that both the AAP and the M5S had to face at the beginning of their institutional mandates, and is something that was reflected in the allegation of them lacking political experience an ideological vision (more below). These allegations are losing validity with time and with the accumulation of political practise by the party-movements.

test that engages with this legacy and that will show us if and how emancipatory participatory practices can subvert this logic.

The M5S's participatory discourse aims to change the representative democratic canon into a 'direct democracy' and tries to do so through the use of ICT tools. The existence of the M5S is partially the realisation of this paradigm because local groups emerged spontaneously using internet platforms, starting from Grillo's blog and moving on to meetup.com. ICT infrastructure allows the M5S members to implement an advanced form of e-democracy where local groups are generally free to use the platforms they prefer, including open source software such as 'airesis' and 'parelon', or the one preferred by the Pirate Party - 'liquid feedback'. The M5S clusters implement experimentalism and enhance the concept of demodiversity. First, this is because they develop multiple forms of local democratic organisation, and second, it is because they use different technologies to get organised. At the national level, the system in use is the M5S operating system or 'Rousseau', developed by the company Casaleggio Associati. Critics argue that the equation of the internet with unrestricted freedom and expansion of democracy is simplistic and demagogic and that the central leadership of the movement use it manipulatively while the M5S defends such actions by stating that it is bringing about a cultural revolution that takes time to succeed. Besides being incipient, tentative, and experimental, the M5S' e-democracy is innovative and is expanding participation. Coupled with e-democracy innovation, the local devolution of the M5S is a key factor in understanding its political form and force. Activists are engaged in social and political struggles at the grassroots and they do not pertain to the movement merely at the virtual level. The M5S is a network but not a purely virtual movement. Elected representatives continue to interact with the grassroots groups bringing citizen decisions within institutions. The M5S proves that ICT can contribute to attracting people to politics and can do so not only at a virtual level, but also through physical engagement at the community level.

Party-movements enter the system as outsiders who are aiming to change it, this hybrid positioning entails a paradox. They bring a participatory discourse as a solution to the political limits of political-colonialism, the political abyssal exclusions, the elitism, the formalism and the centrality of representation. However, when competing in elections, party-movements face the realistic challenge of internal unity – an electoral winning attitude that

undermines the participatory perspectives and manifests internal authoritarianism. This has been the case for both the AAP and the M5S, where the centralism of the respective leaders represents a contradiction that is difficult to bear for many activists. The electorate positively regards leadership centralism because it represents a moral alternative to traditional political elites and it results in electoral success. Without adapting to the 'winnability' of elections, a party-movements potential would remain unused and outside the political system. By having electoral success as an objective, they lose their originality and reduce the democratisation potential. This is the paradox faced by party-movements in the transition from civil society to politics. In order to bring about participation into institutional politics they need to institutionalise themselves, but, while they institutionalise they undermine the democratisation potential of their movement.

Common critiques directed at party-movements often have to do with: their lack of traditional party structures (only for the M5S), their lack of traditional political experience, and their ideological positions. The ideologies of the AAP and the M5S are outspokenly neutral, as they both claim to follow no traditional ideological guidelines and that their ideology is participatory democracy (*swaraj* or direct democracy). Both party-movements are criticised for this ubiquitous position, and rightfully so, for it is a strategic political characteristic that deserves scrutiny.

In the case of the AAP the ideological diversity was inherited from the different position of the activists that took part in the *India Against Corruption* campaign, where the unifying signifier was anti-corruption. The M5S emerged with a stronger connection with the left, both because of Grillo's personal position and due to the orientation of its first generation of activists. However, the electoral success of 2012 onwards have made the party-movement engage activists and voters from other political orientations in a panorama that is equally trans-ideological. The AAP detractors consider the lack of formal ideology a political weakness, as it implies that the party-movement has solutions for simple problems but misses being able to come up with long-lasting solutions for India's major issues. Similar allegations have also been directed towards the M5S. Both party-movements object to the notion that their ideological vagueness is due to the diversity of the people that joined the party-movement

have different and contradictory political and ideological views. This lack of ideology constitutes one of the reasons why the two party-movements would allegedly be short-lived.

Generally, a party's internal democracy is challenged by the hierarchical ways of making a decision. This is something from which the AAP and the M5S are not alien to. However, both also introduce significant innovation in expanding participation when it comes to making policy decisions. The AAP and the M5S introduce the focus on people's consultation as a political praxis. Representatives of other parties are not requested to consult their membership in order to take political decisions. Party-movements – and especially the M5S in this case, however, integrate this democratic consultation within their structure and beyond. With much imperfection in the implementation and consultation of this process, this is a double response to the crisis of liberalism; one, which can be related to democratisation of the party, and two, to the extension of such democratisation among the membership (a point returned to briefly below).

Party-movements condemn the ideological politics of traditional parties with the argument that these ideologies eventually lead to the same outcome in terms of corruption and political-colonial rule. The AAP and the M5S integrate within themselves the social division among ideological discourses and propose participation as a mediating tool between ideological differences. This is a form of democratisation that brings the ideological conflict within the party-movement. They claim to represent not only the left or the right but the wholeness of the political spectrum, that is 'the people'. Their membership is allegedly entitled to take policy decisions through a participatory approach into the alternative communicative and organisational forms created by the movements, especially with local groups and e-democracy interaction. The AAP adopted this method in Delhi in 2013 to decide if it should form into a minority government, and the M5S in various cases such as with the policy decision on same sex marriage.

In other words, with their post-ideological position, party-movements do not overcome or amalgamate left and right as they emerge in society. They do, however, overcome the allegedly false political divide among them within the institutional framework. Party-movements unveil the hypocrisy of institutional politics during neoliberal globalisation, where the mainstream parties of the left and of the right adopt similar policy decisions.

Shifting the strategic focus on policies rather than politics, party-movements adopt participation in what I call the ‘methodological ideology’;³⁷⁶ by stressing that people decide on the party-movement’s political positions they claim that instead of fixed ideological positions, people’s common sense is the form of making political decisions.³⁷⁷

The ideology present in both the AAP and the M5S’ discourses is politics centred on citizens, with a stronger state that intervenes as a mediator to equalize the excesses of power and wealth. This kind of ideology is a political trump in terms of electoral support and political praxes. It is also the reason why some policies are central in party-movements political lines, as they are to democratise politics (clean criminal record, equity but not excess in salary and reimbursements of representatives, limit of two mandates, etc.). Party-movements claim that their ideology is a methodological framework from which a theoretical framework derives. They accept the lack of political vision maintaining that such vision shall be built collectively. To translate it into Gandhi’s philosophy, ends and means must be equally valid and valuable, therefore truth and non-violence are bound together. While mainstream ideologies give the precedence to theory and ends, a participatory ideology gives the precedence to the methodology and the means. For example both the AAP and the M5S advocate a new citizenship based on duties, the main one being participation. The question is how to make sure that from valuable methodology follows valuable political ends and objectives. The attempted response is that participation is a self-evident democratic objective that in practice, as opposed to in theory, shall provide the answer to this question – from the bottom-up.

³⁷⁶ With this methodological ideology, the AAP and the M5S create an unforeseen political variable in the electoral market. While parties generally control the market through political orientation, the AAP and the M5S collect sympathies from all political positions. The rising global domain of domestic politics, the weaker role of the state and the predominant role of non-state actors are three reasons that strengthen the ideology divide in theory but flatter the political responses in the institutional complex among parties incorporating different ideological discourses. As a response, voters are increasingly incoherent in supporting political parties and post-ideological party-movements such as the AAP and the M5S gain much currency attracting incoherent voters and offering them the possibility to transform their dissatisfaction in political participation. An example is the case of same-sex marriage, which was voted in favour for by 85,4% of the M5S’ activists, thereby providing evidence – to still be further investigated – that 30-33% of its right-wing constituency massively voted in favour of the policy, something that would most probably not happen with the same people in a right wing party. This case demonstrates that the methodological ideology position has an impact on the political line and also on the social common sense of former established ideologies.

³⁷⁷ As analysed above, especially in the cases like the of Bhushan-Yadav case or the choice of the EFDD group at the European parliament for the M5S, the ability of the leaders to direct consensus towards one or another direction is prominent and problematic in terms of democratisation. Here again, the balance between leadership centralism and participation is delicate.

Practice is based on the assumption that with a trans-scalar approach that goes from the local to the global, personal commitment and responsibility (duty and participation) is a guarantee against alienation and subversion of the political ends and a form to reconcile conflicting societal interests for an innovative political dialogue.

With their initial innovation of Indian and Italian politics, the AAP and the M5S have made a small move of the political abyssal line. This is true in that they recreate citizens' political affection, empower them to choose their candidates (or be one), define political programmes and open up a space of bottom-up participation in policy decisions. A larger move of the line requires party-movements to show consistency, inclusiveness and creativity in the participatory space that they create. They do so if they are able to oppose the root causes of social fascism by creating new solidarities, which also disavow the lack of democracy in the remaining five social structures. As a result, party-movements: open up to a wider debate on the six epistemologies proper of the six social structures; and they open a space that can be defined as 'intra-cultural' dialogue between the knowledge of the family, workplace, market, community and world-space and that of the state in order to produce a diverse normative account.

The comparison of India and Italy is extremely fascinating for the study of party-movements. On the one hand, their cultural, economic and social differences seem uninfluential in the main structure of the analysis above, in that both the AAP and the M5S struggle against similar political faults and provide comparable responses. Evidence shows that both engage with the ideal of honest and transparent politics proffering a different interaction between elites and society. They experiment with participation in their local constituencies where conflicts and their resolutions put the idea of horizontality under stress and constitute a challenge and an opportunity concerning the methodological post-ideology that is embraced. On the other hand, different socio-political conflicts return diverse strategies. For example, the M5S responds to the transition undergone by the Italian state in what is a relatively small country, whereas the AAP instead faces the vastness of territory, language, culture and religious diversity in a country where grassroots engagement generally competes, complements and stimulates the state in a variety of forms. This explains their

relatively different participatory approaches and why the AAP opted for a party structure and symbolism, while the M5S maintains an unstructured movement dimension.

The issue of participation stays in a position to have a reversal effect on the political abyssal line and the philosophical segregation of the atomised community that is inscribed in Western modernity and that acts as an obstacle for the democratisation of the six social structures. Movements loose strength with institutionalisation (Alberoni 2014) and parties tend to create oligarchic rules (Michels 1915); this is the strength of the political abyssal line, in that after suffering a thin democratic shift, it pushes back to its original position in the political-colonial spectrum and beyond. It secludes society by creating a new mechanism of control and sanctioning. This is done in order to limit and prevent similar insurgent democratic tendencies in the future and to separate the six social structures with more solid borders. In this way, the political abyssal line reinforces social fascism and increases disillusion in many of those that were committed for the alternative that failed. For this reason, party-movements are called to respond with an epistemological responsibility and engage in the practice of translation of the different life experiences as it is forged in all six social structures. This implies that they must preserve both of their dimensions, i.e., party and movement. Losing the first (i.e., party) would neutralise the institutional potential of the second (i.e., movement), while without the second, the first's political potential to move the political abyssal line is extremely limited and even dangerous because it stimulates the fight or push back of the abyssal thinking.

The data collected during the fieldwork phase of the research, accounts for many of the traits of the dynamics outlined by Alberoni and Michels without one having the complete picture of this evolution. The impact of this predictable trajectory on the democratic potential shall not be undermined. Their respective epistemological and political successes are different and their paths irregular, in that most of the time they do not merge. The more the M5S and the AAP obtain political success, the more they are challenged in their democratisation potential. However, victory and failure are not absolute and may be regressive, where if progressive democratisation fails, conservative political-colonialism wins and vice-versa. Both within the state and within the movements themselves, there is a constant bargaining that goes on between these two forces. In other words, the fallacy of the M5S and the AAP, that is

the process of institutionalisation and oligarchic tendency undertaken by their elites, does not disqualify the cases but does provide evidence of the transition from movement to institution that can serve as a lesson learnt for democracy. A lesson that, to some extents, may be similar to other party-movements (see Santos 2015b), but that incorporates peculiarities. What has interested me here the most was trying to answer the following questions: what do they demonstrate concerning the oppressive potential of the political-colonial regime as a system? What alternatives are conceivable to avoid the same blunders? If the institutionalised version of the M5S and the AAP are delusions, this implies that as a movement there was potential. What then is the difference among the two?

The democratic potential of the AAP and the M5S needs to be addressed at various levels. This includes at what level they innovate democratic theory and practice, with a special focus between freedom and participation. How do these two movements integrate participation with representation? Another analytical level is the difference between the actual work of the activists and representatives and the overall discourse of the movement. Finally, the analysis contemplated the electoral innovations brought by the movement in terms of democratisation of representation and, as a consequence, of the response provided to the crisis of political liberalism.

7.3 The question of populism and participation

The first theoretical chapter elaborated on populism as a possible hole in the political-colonial system. This is what both the AAP and the M5S – allegedly populist movements³⁷⁸ – attempt to do with their discourse of participation and devolution. In this section, I draw some conclusions concerning populism, participation and experimentalism in order to have a deeper understanding of the democratic potential of these party-movements.

Gandhi made a call to Indians of all religions, castes and origins to unite in what was an anti-establishment and anti-colonial discourse that has much in common with most of the features listed by scholars to describe populist phenomena. However, demagoguery is

³⁷⁸ The AAP and the M5S are widely recognised as populist parties. For the AAP see for instance (Nigam 2015; Mahaprashasta 2014; Sampath 2015; Sinha 2015; Wyatt 2014, 2015; Harriss 2014). For the M5S see for instance (Biancalana 2014; Biorcio 2015b; Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013, 2015; Corbetta 2013; Lanzone and Woods 2015; Tarchi 2015; Turner 2013a). Grillo himself acknowledges (Grillo 2013b, 2013f) and rejects (Grillo 2015a) the populist label.

unconceivable within a Gandhian vision of democracy just as detractive populism is alien to this vision.³⁷⁹ However, Gandhi could be labelled as a populist leader considering his appeal to the (moral) people. In fact, and differently than Chatterjee's political society, Gandhi aimed at changing the law as well as the moral exception of its application, as his political agenda was alternative to the liberal democratic model and the form of the modern state. Considering the broadness and ambiguity of the use of the term 'populism' it is absolutely inadequate to adopt it for Gandhi. There are however, a number of reasons for which his political views may find an echo in current populist perspectives. Some of the critical criteria by which demagogic populism is analysed and interpreted are foreign to Gandhi's vision: party politics, leader centralism, standardisation of difference, massing of the people, manipulation, dependence from electoral results and a political response provided as a reaction not as a proposal. Gandhi articulated a democratic vision, not a simple reaction to the colonial status quo. Despite this, however, participatory populism has a number of elements in common with Gandhi's democratic proposal. These include: criticism towards and the search for alternatives to liberal democracy, protest and disobedience as a form of political action, reconciliation of the individual and community, new educational burst (informative and active volunteering in populist movements), popular and civic participation in politics beyond the vote, opposition to bureaucracy and redefinition or elimination of the state-society distinction, and promotion of political activism as opposed to 'voluntary servitude'.

Party-movements focus on popular participation and attempt to find political viability for the de-radicalisation of representation and its combination with participatory methods and forms. The political *status quo*, by paying superficial attention to their political ideas and proposals and labelling them as being simply populist without dissimulating the prejudicial political use made of the term, creates a discursive confusion around the emerging alternative that results in the defence of the elitist view of representation. The dual acceptance of the term populism as both demagogy and participation may be applied to party-movements in order to understand if they practice simply demagogy or whether they also embrace the label of participatory populism. The empirical findings highlight that both of the party-movements

³⁷⁹ The second chapter explores and negates the criticism from a *Dalit* perspective accusing Gandhi of willing to co-opt Untouchables to the freedom struggle with a demagogic discourse of care for them.

in this study have a participatory approach and they stress their potential to innovate democratic practices. The participatory feature of populism does not exclude the demagogic one and indeed both party-movements employ a large amount of demagogic discourse and political form. They do so for example, with participation being widely open at the base but much more centralised when it comes to party organisation. The balance is not black or white, party-movements offer innovation and a certain level of centralism. The main reason for this contradictory approach is their presence in the representative market. As seen above, without solid leadership party-movements would be disqualified with voters.

Party-movements adopt the term ‘the people’ to refer to people as being the ‘common person’, ‘citizen’ or ‘people of the web’. This is a moralised vision of people coming from their rejection of the restriction of the democratic pillar in favour of the liberal-constitutional pillar centred on representation. They engage with participation as a new characteristic of the moralised people. This approach is justified by the fact that both the M5S and the AAP originated in civil society as opposed to the political establishment. Although this moral acceptance of the people is also present in right-wing populism, the role claimed here for the people is different, as it is to achieve the moralisation of politics. Right wing populism focuses on the close exclusion of people, while participatory populism stresses the role of the agency of the moral people to overcome the exclusionary conception of the people as a part of opening the people up to wholeness. It should be noted that the moralised people is a paternalist concept and is restricted to criteria of acceptability. Regardless, the point is that the innovation of party-movements stands on the insistence of participation as the moralising effect of the people. This is the novelty of democratic power, which, at least to some extents, can be shared among those who participate as opposed to the elite that is elected to take decisions. Populism has the capacity to expand the democratic debate of both, its democratic criteria and its life spheres. The ‘chain of equivalence’, that is, the collection of the democratic demands in the populist ‘empty signifier’, makes populism vague and demagogic, as well as a democratic potential through an experimentalism and practice (Laclau 2005a).

The AAP and the M5S do not oppose or *de facto* embrace representation or the institution of the state, but they do provide an expanded perspective to combine representation and participation. The AAP and the M5S, with their empty signifiers and chains

of equivalences of social democratic demands, attempt to provide an answer to the issue of the trans-scale (Santos 2006c:25–27, 2014:178–79).³⁸⁰ The engagement that the AAP and the M5S have within civil society provides a space of recognition at different administrative levels for social struggles and participatory and emancipatory actions on the ground.

It is undisputed that the presence of charismatic leaders such as Kejriwal and Grillo has been a crucial element for the emergence of these two party-movements. They differ in that they possess a different age (Grillo is 20 years older than Kejriwal), different life trajectories, different communicative styles and different life views. They do share, however, a lay political trajectory as champions of civil society that engaged within social struggles without political interest and that then resorted to politics to provide another consistency to their social involvement. Kejriwal and Grillo have given credibility to their respective social enterprises and have injected their party-movements with their personal social prestige. They are criticised for their demagogic appeal to the people and the adopted method of authoritarian management. They also represent an alternative class of elite, an ‘elite of calling’ (Gupta 2013) that struggles at the margin and then attempts to bring the margin at the centre. Their political success depends on the fact that the electorate (not the general people but those who made the effort to go and vote), recognise the ‘marginalisation of the centre’ and identify in them (arguably rightly or wrongly) an embodiment of an alternative.

Their personification represents hope, someone who is able to collect the voices from the margins and unite them (although not without conflicts), and is prized by those who vote and declare their impatience with the traditional way of doing politics. A dangerous alarm indeed. People do not feel represented by those who should represent them and suddenly they have a choice, candidates coming from outside the usual political landscape, from civil society, who they think they can trust more than the political elite. The new preference is not

³⁸⁰ Political-colonialism has vague internal boundaries. There are zones of overlapping between the elite and colonised society. Electoral favouritism, political patronage, corruption and the mafias, are all zones in which lay citizens do incur in the formally different but politically equivalent traps of the colonial power. With the justification that there are no alternatives, or for the sake of satisfying a personal interest, citizens are co-opted and cooperate with the system with a double shortcoming: they reinforce the political-colonial regime and weaken the possible alternative to it. Regardless of its bottom-up democratic value, populism proves that although domesticated by indolent reason society is not completely passive. This is also due to the scale of political-colonialism: the bigger the scale, the greater the generalisation to be made, the farther the subject is from their interests.

due to the fact that these new leaders are able to handle the technics of governance better than those they want to substitute. This is probably the reason that discourages many others from voting for the AAP and the M5S who are considered politically immature. Apart from this, people do vote for them because they propose to expand the political into the social sphere. Therefore, the voters' trust in Kejriwal and Grillo represents primarily the hope of participation, inclusion and power sharing.

Participation and strong or authoritarian leadership stand in contradiction to one another, despite this, they may be allied in a context where power centralisation is needed to decentralise power and the leadership, through conformity in the practice. Do the AAP and the M5S prove this correct? Do their leadership decentralise the central power that they win in elections? This is still a question mark, but how else could voters in a liberal democratic regime – which sole democratic instrument is the vote – participate in influencing the political system and pushing it to a change? Protest, demonstration, social struggle, social organisation... precisely what these two leaders have done in their life before attempting to change things from within, and it is precisely for this reason that they must not renounce their previous social profile in order to be innovative.

The AAP's 'appeal to the people' is directed to the individual, the 'common person' as part of a proxy community such as those of the 'model villages' of Ralegan Siddhi and Hiware Bazar in Maharashtra. This aspect is related with the significance of the individual in a Gandhian vision of democracy where individual freedom and community abnegation are combined (Gianolla 2015:927). Therefore, the concept of the 'people' used by the AAP is intrinsically moral and mobilised from within by each individual who is responsible to, and benefits from, being a part of and contributing to the community. Participation and mobilisation characterises the pre electoral and electoral campaigns of the AAP, engaging a big number of volunteers in activities on the ground to collect ideas for the political programme and to raise awareness to vote. A similar call to individual mobilisation within the community is present in the symmetric concept of 'citizen' adopted by the M5S to identify the common person that is morally honest and socially engaged in the local dimension (meetup groups). This is what resounds in Grillo's initial call to move from social to political actions before participating in the first elections with civic lists.

The opposition to the elite is built vertically and horizontally, as on the one hand the AAP and the M5S adopt the brusque opposition to 'corrupt politicians' and self-interested and selfish elite. On the other hand, the appeal to the common people also alerts those lazy fellow citizens that are irresponsibly abandoned to the control of the elite and to voluntary servitude (Boétie 2011).

The AAP's 'call to participate' cuts across economic, social, cultural, religious and urban communities. The results of the Delhi elections of 2015 shows that the whole of society supported the AAP and the success of 2013 was already built on these cross-societal lines (Ghosh 2014a; Karat and Rajalakshmi 2014; Mahaprashasta 2013). The M5S has an ambiguous position on immigration, but the literature proves that the appeal of the movement is to the *demos* and not to the *ethnos* (Corbetta 2013; Lanzone 2014). The AAP and the M5S discourses call for wide mobilisation that goes way beyond the mere vote for their respective party-movement.

The M5S invites 'citizens' to join its local clusters and engage in the 'laboratories of participation' that they represent. Participation starts at the grassroots and extends upward to the municipal, regional, national and supranational (i.e., European) level, local groups enjoy an almost unrestricted level of independence. Institutionalisation however (through electoral victories), transforms local groups almost entirely into municipal administrations (interview Bertoldo), as it forces the groups to comply with institutional demands and increases the level of expectation from the movement at large.

The people of party-movements are therefore not merely a generic and unitary reference of the rhetoric – which nonetheless exists especially in the leaders' discourse – but rather are a concrete group of people that meet at the local level and work on local social and political needs. Moreover, the AAP and the M5S open the selection of candidates to common people, this implies that, at least to some extent, the individuals of whom 'the people' is made up of may step into the institutional world producing an alternative political class that is in competition with the traditional elite of professional party politicians. The 'people' remains a vague concept because participation needs to be coded or given rules in order to be organised, but organising participation has an implication on the horizontal sharing of power among 'the people'. Nevertheless, the vagueness of a participatory people should not be confused with

the pure ambiguity generally linked to demagogic populism, and people's participation should not be roughly merged into a demagogic misrepresentation of the instable variability of the sovereign of a polity. Analysed in light of participation, the 'variability of the people' provides many more acute instruments to assess its consistency and gather ideas for its representation whenever necessary. This is so because when people participate, although not in the ideal horizontal conditions, they can take part in the definition of the general will.

When populism is characterised by participation the issue of leadership remains controversial. However, at the base or grassroots level, it is alien to demagogy because it is related to the actual work of activists. 'Leadership is never a given, and demands the constant exercise of rhetoric, argument and justification. It is always seen and read as provisional, as demanding a constant labour of affirmation and confirmation' (Mendes 2004a:109). The leaders of party-movements understand the heterogeneity of the people as a political potential and open it up to diversity through participation from below and open the leadership through this. This seems to be what happened in the AAP and the M5S as far as they promote a redefinition of the relationship between leaders and activists and open channels for activists to become leaders. This faith in the people spontaneously brings a reconsideration of: the marginal role assigned to it in the representative regime, the role of the establishment and its political actions in order to see if they comply with the promises they make. The next step is to question the representative system as a whole, advocating the restriction of the role of the establishment and the expansion of the role of the people through participatory mechanisms. Regardless of their success in achieving these objectives, party-movements are able to bring these issues into the political agenda from a social perspective.

The 'polarisation and simplification of issues' is a feature that more than any other may characterise these two party-movements as demagogic populist. By applying the 'sociology of absences' we see that what party-movements enunciate with resounding demagogy is also part of a strategy of participatory mobilisation. How is their simplistic rhetoric contributing to their diverse participatory agendas? The simplistic rhetoric read in a participatory perspective shows that the AAP and the M5S have contributed to dispute the division of the state and civil society and made a case for bridging the two. While traditional politics defends its domain over wider society protecting the institutions and mechanisms of

the state, the promoter of participatory experiences regards civil society as the legitimate author of the democratic institutions. The simplification would be void and demagogic only if disconnected from bottom-up participation, however, the higher the degree of participation within party-movements, the more effective the achievement of the democratisation objective and the less the demagoguery of the simplistic rhetoric.

The AAP was initiated and concretised at the political level by a civil society campaign. It has mobilised a number of social activists in direct engagement and forced its opponents to even give space to social activists among the rank of their candidates or as an external support (i.e., Kiran Bedi in Delhi 2015). The M5S emerged in support of different social struggles such as the *No-TAV* and the *No Dal Molin* and still plays a role in support of social movements and social struggles already on the ground (Mosca 2014). Nevertheless, the relationships between civil society groups and the state in this kind of a heterogeneity is a delicate issue. Can party-movements play a politically unifying role between different social movements and social organisations struggling at different levels for democratisation? Santos considers the division between social movements an obstacle for them to improve their relationships with the state, '[t]here are too many separation theories and very few union theories, for an inauspicious tradition, in my view, in left wing politics: polarising an issue is polarising a difference' (Santos 2010c:73). In this study it has been seen that participation combined with populism is a response that resulted because the populist inclusive reason of the empty signifier and the chain of equivalence contains diversity and limit separations based on individual demands. The problematic issue is that the AAP and the M5S count too much on leadership centralism as a unifying factor as opposed to horizontality and participation. As far as they will increase dialogical methods to obtain the same result – and reduce the centrality of the leadership – they increase their potential. Dialogical methods imply a higher level of participatory evolution, leadership sharing and probably a different social attitude where the individual social responsibility is higher with respect to the current liberal mainstream pattern. The AAP's and the M5S's attempts are significant, primarily because they permit one to learn how to criticise and think beyond leadership centralism. Theories on democratisation can take advantage of considering party-movements as laboratories (of features and shortcomings) of the dialectics between the reduction of leadership centralism and increased horizontality.

Simplicity and immediacy of language may relate to democratic (and constitutional) compliance as opposed to demagoguery. Both these party-movements focus on amendments or implementation of participatory processes through their respective constitutions. The AAP is working to amend and improve the Indian constitution (in particular the 73rd and 74th amendments concerning the *panchayati raj*). Likewise, the M5S defends the Italian constitution against the attempt of power centralisation by the government and a parliamentary majority and advocates for amendments to increase the level of participation in Italian democracy.³⁸¹ From this point of view, both party-movements not only stay within the political and rhetorical parameters but they want to bring to them the potential implementation of more participatory democracy. Arguments concerning that they operate against the system via their subversion, – such as the AAP’s insistence on tabling the *jan lokpal* bill in Delhi in February 2014 or the M5S’s harsh opposition in the parliament, seem to represent attempts by both to improve rather than destroy the democratic machinery. Perhaps the problem is the audacity of these attempts, which is not conforming to conservative political correctness, but rather is sitting too close to other not so experimentalist so called populist parties, especially those of the right wing.

Demagoguery is part of electoral democracy. Just as any other party within the institutional framework and competing in elections does,³⁸² the AAP and the M5S incorporate a level of discursive demagoguery. However, party-movements also introduce instruments to

³⁸¹ Since before the electoral victory in 2013 (Romiti 2013), the position of Grillo and the M5S on the constitution is that they are open to reforms concerning the introduction of provisions of direct and participatory democracy (such as the legal statute of popular bills or propositional referendums without quorum). The M5S became more defensive of the constitution during the political legislature (since February 2013) when the constitution was invoked by the M5S in contrast to infractions against it by the other political forces and by those who are against the reformist agenda of the government. A few examples are listed below: The M5S’s representatives occupied the senate and made a ‘Gandhian reading of the constitution’ protesting the fact that the parliamentary committees had not convened for almost two months after the election day (Redazione Repubblica 2013a). The M5S representatives occupied the roof of the parliament to protest against the government amendment to article 138 of the constitution (which regulates the conditions and timing for the amendment of the constitution itself). The M5S maintain that the constitutional amendments proposed were contrary to the participatory amendments necessary and in favour of more power centralism (Redazione Corriere della Sera 2013b; Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2013b). The M5S supported the defence of the constitution by scholars and constitutionalists such as Stefano Rodotà and Gustavo Zagrebelsky (Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano 2014c). On the talk show ‘8 e mezzo’ (La7 TV channel) of 10 January 2014, Stefano Rodotà affirmed that the M5S saved the constitution with the parliament roof protest that was ‘a politically relevant act’.

³⁸² Scholars tend to agree that all political parties resort to what Canovan (1981) defines ‘politicians’ populism’ which corresponds to the demagoguery of a political leader to win electoral consensus and support (Mastropaolo 2005:59–60; see also Taggart 2000:107).

contrast the demagoguery of politicians. For example the M5S includes basic defensive attitudes such as a two term mandate limit for representatives who must have a clean criminal record and must not be part of political parties. The AAP and the M5S have retained a strong anti-establishment rhetoric claiming that they are not part of it. They have also demonstrated a capacity to comply, at least partially, with these statements. Their relations with other parties is controversial, as the M5S rejects any coalition whereas the AAP had accepted to form a minority government with the external support of the Congress party in 2013 but was unwilling to make compromises and this is one of the reasons that led to its resignation after just 49 days in office. This is quite different from right wing parties such as the North League and the BJP who are open to governmental coalitions. Acting differently than other so called populist parties of the past (i.e., the common person party by Guglielmo Giannini or the French Poujadism), the M5S does not pay lip service to the political system they criticise by making coalitions or merging with other political parties (Bassoli 2012). Similar measures are adopted by the AAP that insists on the right to recall and to reject. Party rhetoric generally varies in light of a range of aspects: if the party is in institutions or not, if the party is in government or opposition, according to the relevance of the topics in the media and depending on the administrative level. The AAP and the M5S are no exception to this dynamic. However, media critics generally follow these two party-movements very closely, scrutinising scrupulously their political decisions and amplifying their social resonance.

The relation between populism and grassroots politics is contradictory. Populism is advocated from the bottom-up to potentiate the political struggle of local populations (Chatterjee 2011; Mendes 2004a). This is besides the fact that the term 'populism' possesses a pejorative definition that is being widely adopted by the top-down oriented political elite to diminish the political identity of social struggles (Mendes 2005). The complex of features listed above can be resumed with equal vagueness by the terms 'populism' and 'political experimentalism'. So, why then should one choose to adopt a term that incorporates a negative acceptance? The AAP and the M5S have demagogic characteristics that the literature has clearly identified, but they also encompass innovative and incomplete characteristics that are tentative, and perfectible, responses to the crisis of liberalism. Santos argues that we are in time of paradigmatic transition where the liberal world-vision is undergoing a crisis which puts

forward ‘strong questions’ to which there are only weak answers (Santos 2008b). However, weak answers diversify into weak-weak and weak-strong answers. ‘Weak-strong transform the perplexity caused by the strong question into positive energy. [...] Weak-weak answers, in contrast, discard and stigmatize the perplexity as the symptom of a failure to see beyond the existing hegemony’ (Santos 2008b:251). Adopting the label of populism may be a mere weak-weak answer in the confrontation with the crisis of liberalism. However, the AAP and the M5S may also be a kind of weak-strong answer which open a space to look beyond the crisis of liberal democracy, work around political apathy and envisage an intrinsic combination of representation and participation to refurbish the democratic spirit.

The reason why party-movements gather support and consent is related to the oppressive character of political-colonialism, which politically and socially marginalises society until new participatory movements provide them the space and enthusiasm to step in. The M5S and the AAP, through the undebatable mechanism of the vote and with their electoral successes –, have shed light on the new forms of participation that advance a renewal of the classical political sphere. This is a major contribution to contemporary political theory, as the AAP and the M5S strengthen the reflection of paths to go beyond the political apathy that characterises the rootless abstractedness of representative empiricism.

If populism is used as a synonymous of demagogy, why not use the term demagogy directly? Why not do the same for the other categories vaguely and irregularly assigned to populism, such as manipulation, authoritarianism, protest, political and social malaise, racism, xenophobic nationalism, communitarianism, political newfangledness, violence, unrest, etc. Adopting more precise terms helps to understand what is being considered and studied. Equating a movement to be too simply labelled as populist, as with the political parties and movements which are studied here, does not classify them for what they are. The forthcoming theoretical and rhetorical justice would avoid the surreptitious instrumental opposition of us (the legitimate politicians – traditional party structures) against them (the populist-demagogic manipulators capable merely of protesting). This would help to de-radicalise democratic representation, open the space up to an ecological acceptance of different democratic demands and endorse demo-diversification of democratic regimes leading to ‘peaceful or conflictive coexistence in a given social field of different models and practices of democracy’

(Santos and Avritzer 2005:LXIII). There would be more space for a political dialogue based on the practice of 'translation', 'the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among different experiences of the world without jeopardizing their identity and autonomy, without reducing them to homogeneous entities' (Santos 2008b:261).

7.4 Concluding and normative remarks

Political-colonialism gathers opponents everywhere, therefore, the translation work of these opponents represents an emergent political subaltern force. The World Social Forum (WSF) is a hub of translational practices, examples of which have been, although in different forms and degrees, the Arab spring and the Indignados and Occupy movements. Concerning these, Chantal Mouffe (2013) affirmed: '[t]he task now is to ascertain how all of the energies that have burst out can produce lasting political effects'. Party-movements, such as the AAP and the M5S, respond to Mouffe's preoccupation, and have emerged from civil society's struggle to incorporate, at least in part and especially at the beginning, the democratic demands of protest movements and engage in the intercultural translations attempting to bring the struggle within state institutions.

Realist politics considers the concept of representation, as it is defined in liberal democratic regimes, necessary to handle big polities in conformity with (some) democratic principles. One questions if under the same realist reasoning would it not make sense to assume that the discrepancy between formal and substantial effectiveness of such a model is a sufficient enough reason to search and experiment alternatives that would make the polity more closely democratic in substance rather than only in a specific formal model. Santos explains, and was presented above, that liberal democracy is oriented towards the 'capacity to deliver governability and gives priority to the value of freedom over the value of equality' while participatory democracy is oriented towards the 'capacity to empower citizens and achieve social justice, thus seeking a dynamic equilibrium between freedom and equality' (Santos 2002b:342). This difference is substantial because participation reduces the role of the market over society while the elitist orthodoxy on representation reinforces it. The market and the people are political competitors that party-movements identify as such and privilege the latter.

The AAP and the M5S have re-energised the political sphere with their strong call for honesty and their commitment to choose their candidates in consultation with society. Moreover, they refuse the idea of compromising participatory values for political interests. Up until the present they have rejected political alliances for this reason. This is noteworthy because they are refusing the logic of the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair and Katz 2009) and avoid committing to the system they want to subvert. The future may reserve situations where a delicate political equilibrium will push the AAP and the M5S to consider political alliances, and both parties in 2013³⁸³ responded to this kind of situation without undermining their radical and critical positions. For both party-movements their movement dimensions were very strong at the time. As far as they move forward and institutionalise, they need to keep that dimension active in order to maintain this innovative character. A realist view maintains that compromising in politics is part of a party's maturity. However, as far as this maturity constitutes making a pledge with political-colonialism, it represents the dismissal of party-movement innovation. A paradigmatic change of the system will demand time from this point of view. If party-movements do not compromise but continue to be successful in elections, for instance by means of electoral law, the political-colonial thinking will attempt to take steps forward to further move the abyssal line in order to restrict the potential of party-movements. In this event, such a struggle needs to be fought with tenacity.

Instead of allaying with other parties the AAP and the M5S reinforce their engagement with the people, and through this engagement they potentiate the paradigmatic change they desire. Traditional party representatives do not need to consult the party membership to make political decisions, while in this same process party-movements do seek to engage in a dialogue with the people.³⁸⁴ Both party-movements engage in a pre-electoral dialogue to select candidates and to write political programmes. Also, they remain engaged with the Delhi dialogue and with e-democracy respectively. They demonstrate that consulting

³⁸³ The AAP in Delhi formed the minority government with the external support of the Congress. To not compromise their programme they resigned at the first occasion the Congress did not support their programme. The M5S was offered an opportunity to join with the Democratic Party to form a coalition government at the national level after their success in election, but it rejected such a proposal.

³⁸⁴ A very recent study confirms that Italy's 'main decision makers are essentially party secretaries, especially following the debate over the party crisis. [...] The highly personalized system can present problems for the quality of democracy relating to staff central control and effective accountability among local units' (Cerruto, Facello, and Raniolo 2016:15).

the party membership and society, in order to provide responses to political challenges and issues, is something that is possible and that this step reshapes the substance of representation. To this extent, party-movements provide a double response: one related to democratisation of the party and one related to the extension of such democratisation among the membership.

In analysing the AAP and the M5S I have balanced my attention paid to their political ideas or (post-)ideologies and to their political forms. That is, I focused on what they propose to restructure the institutional functioning of democracy. This is due to the fact that the programme and ideology of a populist movement, although obviously important, cannot be the only central focus when studying party-movements. Mény and Surel rightly maintain that 'it is precisely by identifying populism with specific programmes or ideologies that we miss out on its crucial specificity' (Mény and Surel 2002b:17). As elaborated on above, the AAP's and the M5S's lack of a declared traditional ideology implies that they avoid alienating voters but not that they do not take positions. They do take positions on individual cases and misalign in the liberal vs. socialist paradigm. They also maintain that their ideology is participation and policy focused, even when the policy is as wide as anti-corruption. What do they do with this approach? They create an unforeseen political variable in the electoral market, as while parties generally control the market through political orientation, the AAP and the M5S collect sympathies from all political positions.³⁸⁵

The participatory mechanisms analysed above are examples of internal structural experimental changes of the political forms brought about by party-movements. Moreover, they tackle the 'mechanic' of the electoral tempo, that is the short term interests of elected representatives, through the creation of apparatuses that are able to unpredictably reduce or extend this tempo. Such mechanisms must be under wider social control so they are unpredictable and are also uncontrollable by the elite. In other words, the representatives shall be disjointed from the capacity to make stable programmes to be achieved in a fixed terms. Such terms must be open to positive and negative variation: the short-term (mandate

³⁸⁵ Evidence is the transversal victory of the AAP in Delhi in 2015 and the similar cross-ideological support collected by the M5S in different elections starting from 2012. In 2016, the M5S only lost one out of 20 second ballots as a sign that whenever there is a choice against a traditional party, supporters of other political forces, regardless of the radical left or right, choose the M5S.

bind) objectives of the elite would be questioned and destabilised. Examples include the right to recall elected representatives, but also to appeal to the Supreme Court to investigate the legitimacy of a determined mandate. There may also be mechanisms to extend the tempo of a representative or official to bypass the re-election. For example, let us consider that an elected representative has done only one mandate, she has accomplished all the demands of the electorate and to do so has contradicted the will of the party to which she belongs to. Going to elections would most likely be impossible for her, but remaining in office would be a detraction for the leading elite. Wider society should have the possibility to decide her fate in a sort of referendum. Of course, this mechanism can be used with precaution and limitation, as for instance it should only be allowed to confirm the first mandate and in cases that are supported by the public will.

Party-movements embrace negative democratic rules to limit the power of political elites and thereby political-colonialism. Examples include the: limitation of the number of mandates, right to recall, rotation in the public office, limits to the different positions that a politician can hold in their entire career, and the selection of public officials by lot. These and other instruments may serve the purpose of democratising the political component of the elite and creating a rupture in the power dynamic established between the different components of the elite. In the long run it should result in the dismantling of the static dynamic that makes the whole elite logic function. For this purpose, a political-cultural paradigmatic shift has to be targeted which includes a non-elitist educational model to interrupt the self-reproduction of the elite as a culture of itself. Also, the diffusion of a democratic participatory approach must be targeted in which citizens are encouraged to not be passive voters but to pro-actively play their role in the political sphere. This implies the (at least partial) un-professionalization of politics and the de-institutionalisation of as many political spaces as possible. If the burden of democratic administration is simplified, rearranged, and shared between civil servants and political leaders, the work to be done will be more approachable and the political elite's prerogative of being professional falls apart. Selflessness is a rare characteristic of political leaders, but one that makes the difference, as exemplified by Gandhi. Both the M5S and the AAP have proved that this is a critical point, in particular where personal conflicts create unease and end up in fractures, as in the case of Kejriwal's unwillingness to

work with Bhushan and Yadav. Similar consequences but different causes are behind most of the M5S's expulsions for activists and representatives that do not align with the leadership.

I anticipated in the introduction and restated in the analysis that the AAP and the M5S, when analysed in light of the theoretical framework based on Gandhi and the epistemologies of the South, stimulate reflection beyond their own political proposal. I want to mention a few examples in the following paragraphs, each of them with a statement on the shortcomings of liberal democratic regimes.

Presently, participation in establishing the democratic agenda and formal deliberation are activities restricted to the elite. The political establishment has the monopoly of the creation of the political agenda and of the definition of a narrative to justify that agenda. For instance, in the case of an important infrastructure project, the reasons of the government (who are the body that gets to decide to approve the project), are hegemonic over the reasons of the people that would be negatively affected by the project and oppose it.

Political parties, parliaments and the media are the places of democratic deliberation (regardless of the level of quality it reaches). They are relatively closed to the participation of people and associations that do not belong to the elite who have the power to select and include participants. The political-colonial epistemology forces the space and the actors 'accredited' to participate to the official democratic sphere and largely excludes colonised society from deliberation. Consultations do occur, but in most cases the decision making process is not bound to respect them. Hegemony over deliberation allows the elite to perpetuate its role through laws, political decisions, education systems and epistemological power. The alternatives foresee that the institutional functions of parties, parliaments and the media shall be reshaped in order to become vehicles of inclusion, openness and the locus for the formation of a new political culture in which, at the very least, a random participatory agenda setting (if not a systematic mechanism), may be active to validate democratic decisions and co-define official narratives.

The social interests promoted in society are advocated by the elite. The interests of social groups which are not voiced and advocated by the elite suffer dramatic exclusion from the political sphere and as a result their interests are not taken care of. Citizens who invest

part of their time and energies in democratic activities, which are external to the formal political sphere, have no assurance that their democratic contribution will be considered in the definition of the political agenda.

The interests and rule of a minority (elite) overrules the majority (wider society) and all the minorities that the majority encompasses. The elite is internally divided, including in the case of the government-opposition divide. If a part of the elite (i.e., the opposition) would like to implement decisions that contrast with the interests of the elite, there are several institutional mechanisms to be put in place to act as obstacles, to delay, and to boycott those changes from taking place.

Finally, an elitist model that governs a society creates a form of diffused inaction and over-trust in institutions to solve social issues. This implies that the domain of social interests is constantly outside the range of action of the individual and is controlled by institutions. These are under the domain of the elite or under the domain of those entities allowed by the elite to take care of certain interests. The alternative is a wider consultation and engagement with civil society that can act as a first step to later be combined with a mechanism that would entrust civil society with validating procedures (at least on a random basis). In the long run the division of the state and civil society will be undermined in order to preserve the democratic horizontality among all social players.

With political-colonialism the elite controls society and the very functioning of the democratic machinery is centred on the perpetuation of the elite and its rule. The alternative to this system is a system in which the forms to make decisions are debated by stakeholders. The elite, without political-colonialism, is leadership with the character of public servant, as largely argued by Gandhi. Obviously, the role of parties has to be redesigned and the role of social movements has to be amplified.

As I extensively argued above, elections have the signifying monopoly in liberal democracy and I critically maintain that they serve to delegitimise non-elected citizens and non-citizens (wider society), and do so by force of the political abyssal line, from the formal and politically meaningful democratic sphere. I argue that among the democratic practices, elections hold the monopoly of importance, as it is the moment in which democracy takes

place (with the selection of representatives). The alternative foresees that elections be combined with other forms of participation of which participatory democracy, direct democracy, and active citizenship are but a few examples. Deliberation is a process that involves people and gives them the possibility to interact as decision makers. Regardless of the method used to take decisions, it shall be pushed as far as possible in the democratic process – which corresponds to shifting the political abyssal line. Elections and decision-making shall increasingly lose centrality and follow deliberation in the scale of importance. Even if we assume that a certain degree of deliberation is preserved among representatives of liberal democratic regimes (i.e., in the parliament and with systems of checks and balances), the margin for improvement is very wide.

The AAP and the M5S bring forward the issue of expanding deliberation at the local level, including in neighbourhoods, villages, via e-democracy, and (more controversial) at the state and/or national level. Further improvement can occur on the following three fronts. Firstly, political parties shall adopt a democratic structure and a meta-constitution, which includes the very general principles of inclusion and horizontality. I understand the complexity of defining these principles (due to the conflicting notions of democracy) and implementing them, but this is a theoretical exercise that is worth the effort of sociologists, political scientists and political philosophers.

The second front of innovation concerns the relationship among parties. Currently, they are ruled by the mere balance of forces and self-centred interests, these shall undergo a restructuring to include equally democratic principles and this would be extended to all the relationships between the state's institutions.

Finally, in the long run, the democratisation of the state will imply the democratisation of the relationships of the state with society. This democratisation can be expanded to all the six social structures that were elaborated on above with Santos. The different sources of power shall be recognised and democratised in order to ensure that they remain far from being neglected. This implies a democratisation of all social spaces, not just a democratisation of the polity as an institutionalised political sphere.

I understand that much of the perspectives on Gandhian democratisation are in the utopia range of political theory, as was and still is Gandhi's civilisational proposal. However, Gandhi went far beyond progressive measures with his deconstruction of possessive individualism and the reconstruction of a non-individualistic and non-possessive community. This remains the objective that has persisted unrealised by contemporary political thought and the emergent political practices framed in Western liberalism with its implications and its crisis. To achieve this objective an inter-civilisational dialogue on democratisation is paramount.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Objectives and chronogram

- October 2011 – June 2013 – Exploration, development and consolidation of the project.
 - ✓ Ph. D. courses and research activities;
 - ✓ ALICE Project activities and seminars;
 - ✓ Exploration of various research topics;
 - ✓ Adoption of the research topic with related theoretical and empirical structure;
 - ✓ Elaboration and approval of the research project;
 - ✓ Participation to the Popular University of Social Movement (UPMS) and to the World Social Forum in Tunis;
 - ✓ Co-organisation of the UPMS workshop of Madrid;
 - ✓ Presentations in two international conferences and attendance of other relevant events.
- July 2013 – December 2013 – Expansion and preparation for the fieldwork.
 - ✓ Established contact with the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj;
 - ✓ Established contact with the Aam Aadmi Party of Rajasthan State in Jaipur;
 - ✓ Established contact with Sapienza University of Rome for co-tutelage;
 - ✓ Preparation of fieldwork in India.
- January 2014 – April 2014 – Fieldwork in India.
 - ✓ Ethnography with the AAP, based in the city of Jaipur and interviews carried on with activists and national leaders in Delhi;
 - ✓ Research on Gandhi and Gandhian activism, Jaipur, Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Surat;
 - ✓ Residential experience of *ashram* and meditation centre at the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj (KIGS), Sabarmati Ashram and the Vipassana Meditation Centre in Jaipur;
 - ✓ Participation to the UPMS workshop of Mumbai.
- May 2014 – December 2014 – Systematisation fieldwork in India and the beginning of co-tutelage in Italy.
 - ✓ Systematisation and first analysis of the fieldwork material collected in India;

- ✓ Preparation of the first papers, presentation in two international conference and attendance at other relevant events;
 - ✓ Beginning of the exchange period at Sapienza University in Rome (September);
 - ✓ Exploratory activities for the fieldwork in Italy.
- January 2015 – July 2015 – Fieldwork and co-tutelage exchange in Italy.
 - ✓ Systematisation and first analysis of the fieldwork material collected in India;
 - ✓ Ethnography with the M5S, based in the city of Latina and interviews carried on with activists and national leaders in Rome, Vicenza and Parma;
 - ✓ Ph. D. activities in the ‘Political Studies’ programme at Sapienza university;
 - ✓ Presentation in one international conference and in two Ph. D. seminars;
 - ✓ Drafting of thesis chapters.
 - July 2015 – September 2016 –
 - ✓ Systematisation and analysis of fieldwork material collected in Italy; Overall analysis of empirical data collected;
 - ✓ Presentations in four international conferences;
 - ✓ Drafting of thesis chapters.

Appendix B – List of Interviews carried on in India

Here is the full list of interviews carried on in India with details about place, time, brief information about the position and the corresponding category to which I assigned them (Leader, Activist, Scholar, etc.) as described in the methodology.

1. Ram Ballabh Agarwal (Male, Gandhian activist and *Khadi* Leader) [first interview Jaipur, KIGS 2014-01-15] Gandhian activist;
2. V. S. Vyas (Male, Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur, he served in many national and international institutions, and has written extensively on key issues of agricultural policies and rural development from a Gandhian perspective) [first interview Jaipur, his residence 2014-01-15] Gandhian scholar;
3. Pratibha Jain (Female, Former director of the Centre for Gandhi Studies, University of Rajasthan, Gandhian Activist) [first interview Jaipur, her residence 2014-01-16] Gandhian scholar;

4. Dipankar Gupta (Male, Distinguished Professor and the Director of Centre of Political Affairs and Critical Theory, Shiv Nadar University) [first interview Jaipur, JaiLitFest 2014-01-19] Scholar;
5. Kavita Srivastava (Female, Social activist, secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Leader of the Right to Food Campaign) [first interview Jaipur, her residence 2014-01-25] Social activist;
6. Amitabh & Karanvir [pseudonyms] (Amitabh is a Male Member of Rajasthan Legislative Assembly for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Karanvir is a Male Member of Parliament for the BJP) [first interview Jaipur, public bar 2014-01-27] Other politicians and diplomats;
7. Ramesh Prashad Sharma (Male, Community Based Organisation (CBO) leader of Hingotiya village, Jaipur rural area) [first interview 2014-01-29] Social activist;
8. Asif [pseudonym] (Male, AAP National Council member, electoral campaigner with Arvind Kejriwal. Poet) [first interview Jaipur, convention of the AAP in Rajasthan 2014-02-01] AAP leader;
9. Sunny Sebastian (Male, Journalist – Vice Chancellor of Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication (HJUJ) Jaipur) [first interview Jaipur, Journalism University 2014-02-03] Journalist;
10. Amarjeet [pseudonym] (Male, AAP member, Lok Sabha ticket applicant 2014, *Dalit*. Retired employee of the Banking sector) [first interview Jaipur, AAP office 2014-02-03] AAP activist;
11. Arun [pseudonym] (Male, AAP senior leader of Rajasthan state, AAP National Council member, Lok Sabha Candidate 2014. Farmer) [first interview Jaipur, AAP office 2014-02-03] AAP leader;
12. Veena [pseudonym] (Female, Congress party spokesperson for Rajasthan) [first interview Jaipur, Congress office 2014-02-06] Other politicians and diplomats;
13. Suman [pseudonym] (Male, AAP activist and supporter. Doctor) [first interview Jaipur, AAP office 2014-02-08] AAP activist;
14. Papat Rao Pawar (Male, Surpanch and leader of Hiware Bazar) [first interview Hiware Bazar village 2014-02-12] Other politicians and diplomats;

15. Anna Hazare (Male, Social activist and Gandhian, leader of Ralegan Siddhi village, leader of India Against Corruption campaign) [first interview Ralegan Siddhi village 2014-02-13] Gandhian activist;
16. Sharit Bhowmik (Male, Professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences) [first interview Mumbai, TISS 2014-02-17] Scholar;
17. Radha Bhatt (Female, Director of the Gandhi Peace Foundation) [first interview New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation 2014-02-20] Leader in Gandhian institution;
18. Ram Chandra Rahi (Male, Gandhian socialist son of a freedom fighter and Secretary of the Gandhi Memorial Trust) [first interview New Delhi, Gandhi Memorial Trust 2014-02-20] Leader in Gandhian institution;
19. James [pseudonym] (Male, High ranking diplomat at the EU delegation to India) [first interview New Delhi, EU Embassy 2014-02-21] Other politicians and diplomats;
20. Anupam Mishra (Male, Gandhian, author, journalist, environmentalist, and water conservationist) [first interview New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation 2014-02-24] Gandhian activist;
21. Varun [pseudonym] (Male, Member of the AAP National Executive, AAP Lok Sabha Candidate 2014. University professor) [first interview New Delhi, his residence 2014-02-25] AAP leader;
22. A Annamalai (Male, Director of National Gandhi Museums) [first interview New Delhi, National Gandhi Museum 2014-02-26] Leader in Gandhian institution;
23. Deepika [pseudonym] (Female, Member of the AAP and coordinator of the “Progressive Women in AAP” group. Doctor) [first interview New Delhi, AAP central office 2014-02-26] AAP activist;
24. Rajeev Bhargava (Male, Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies - CSDS) [first interview New Delhi, CSDS 2014-02-26] Scholar;
25. Arvind Kejriwal (Male, National Convener of the AAP) [first interview, New Delhi, his residence at Tilak Lane 2014-02-27] – not anonymised because the interview took place in public – AAP leader;

26. Shyam [pseudonym] (Male, AAP senior national leader, member of National Executives and Election committee of the AAP. ICT expert) [first interview New Delhi, AAP central office 2014-02-27] AAP leader;
27. Jean Drèze (Male, Professor at various universities and Social Activist. Co-author of several books with Amartya Sen) [first interview Sanand, Ahmedabad – Right To Food Conference, 2014-03-02] Scholar;
28. Prem Anand Mishra (Male, Professor at the Gujarat Vidyapith University, Ahmedabad) [first interview Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, 2014-03-04] Gandhian scholar;
29. Tridip Suhrod (Male, Director of Sabarmati *Ashram* Preservation and Memorial Trust and Chief Editor of Gandhi Heritage Portal) [first interview Sabarmati *Ashram*, Ahmedabad, 2014-03-05] Gandhian scholar;
30. Narayan Desai (Male, Social worker with Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave e Jayaprakash Narayan. He was son of Gandhi’s personal secretary Mahadev Desai. He wrote several books on Gandhi including a detailed four volumes biography of Mahatma Gandhi and several books on peace and non-violence) [first Interview Veddchi, 2014-03-07] Gandhian activist;
31. Narayan Desai [second Interview Veddchi, 2014-03-08] Gandhian activist;
32. Chunibhai Vaidya (Male, Social activist. Born in 1917, worked as a Gandhian and with Vinoba Bhave. He led several struggles in the area of land reform) [first interview Sabarmati *Ashram*, Ahmedabad 2014-03-09] Social activist;
33. Amrut Mudi (Male, Director of Gandhi *Ashram* at Sabarmati) [first interview Sabarmati *Ashram*, Ahmedabad 2014-03-10] Leader in Gandhian institution;
34. Rajendra Singh (Male, Environmental and Social Gandhian activist, known as ‘waterman’ and leader of the Arvari river parliament) [first interview KIGS, Jaipur 2014-03-30] Gandhian activist;
35. Vidya Jain (Female, Director of the Centre for Gandhian Studies of Rajasthan University) [first interview Centre for Gandhian Studies, Jaipur 2014-04-03] Gandhian scholar;
36. Amarjeet [pseudonym, second interview at her residence, Jaipur 2014-04-05] AAP activist;

37. P. L. Mimroth and Satish Kumar (Male, P L. Mimroth [Male] is the chairperson of the Centre for Dalit Rights (Jaipur) and Satish Kumar [Male], is the director of the same centre) [first interview, Centre for Dalit Rights, Jaipur 2014-04-07] Social activists;
38. Nikhil Dey (Male, Nikhil Dey is a political activist working in cooperation with Aruna Roy and Shankar Singh and co-founder of the MKSS (*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*) [first interview, Budget Analysis and Research Centre, Jaipur 2014-04-07] Social activist;
39. Madhu Bhaduri (Female, Founding member of the AAP and former member of the AAP National Council. Retired ambassador of India) [first interview email, 2014-04-08] – as Agreed with Bhaduri her name is used because she made her position public – AAP leader;
40. Awadh Prasad (Male, Gandhian Activist and Director of the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj) [first interview KIGS, Jaipur, 2014-04-08] Gandhian activist;
41. Shiv Singh Palawat (Male, Ph. D. candidate, student leader and artist at the University of Rajasthan. Keen interest in Baghat Singh) [first interview KIGS, Jaipur, 2014-04-08] Scholar;
42. Aruna Roy (Female, Gandhian activist working on grassroots democracy and renown in India and abroad, founder of the MKSS and School for Democracy) [first interview KIGS, Tilonia, 2014-04-09] Gandhian activist;
43. Amit Kumar (Male, Project director of the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj) [first interview KIGS, Jaipur, 2014-04-13] Gandhian activist;
44. Suresh Sharma (Male, Former director of CSDS (2004-2007), visiting professor at the MMAJ Academy of International Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi) Scholar;

Appendix C – List of fieldtrips within India and related experiences

Here is the list of rural movements and activists, most of which are oriented by a Gandhian grassroots democracy ideal.

- *Khadi Gramodyog Sashan Vikash Samith* (KGSVS, Bassi village – Rajasthan; 28 January). Khadi was an instrument of struggle that Gandhi framed in the *swadeshi* movement employed by boycotting British products and using national and local produced goods.

KHSVS is a cooperative that works on the *khadi* programme by offering employment opportunities and bringing forward Gandhian ideas about Khadi and rural development;

- KIGS carries out projects of rural development and women empowerment in Gandhian perspectives in the state of Rajasthan. To observe KIGS work, a field visit to Chicana and Hingotiya village was organised on 29 January;
- I visited the Total Revolution movement venue in Veddchi village – Gujarat on 7-8 February. This is a peaceful Gandhian Peace movement formerly coordinated by Narayan Desai whom I interviewed on this occasion;
- Visiting Ralegan Siddhi on 12-14 February I stayed at the premises of the *Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Aandolan* (BVJA - public movement against corruption) coordinated by Anna Hazare whom I interviewed on this occasion;
- I interviewed Aruna Roy at the venue of the Barefoot college (rural and sustainable development coordinated by Bunker Roy) in Tilonia village, Rajasthan on 9 April;
- On 10 April I visited the rural base of the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) a grassroots democratic movement coordinated by Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Sing in Devdungri village – Rajasthan. On the same day I visited the *Loktantrashala* (School for Democracy) a more recent initiative coordinated by Aruna Roy in Bhim village, Rajasthan;
- Thanks to a student friend, I was introduced to activists of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS – Hindu nationalist organisation, national wide). This was the most surreal experience of all the fieldwork, as I was introduced to different members in two different places of Jaipur. My friend had a contact through whom we could talk to a low ranking member of the organisation who then was able to organise a meeting with higher rankings members. All the people I could talk to preferred that I did not voice record, nor could I take down notes of the meetings and I was briefed on the social activities of the organisation and its main ideas.

Appendix D – List of events attended in India

I participated in a number of events considered significant for the research.

- Jaipur Literature Festival, Jaipur 17-21 January. This is advertised as the world's largest free literature festival. Attendance was extremely high and the panels were very rich of

influential thinkers. By the time of the event the AAP was at the peak of its popularity and appreciation and therefore many debates were focusing on the AAP. The event also helped me to establish contacts and conduct interviews;

- Commemoration of Gandhi's Martyrdom, Jaipur 30 January. I participated in two events commemorating Gandhi's Martyrdom. The first one was at the Centre for Gandhian Studies before the creative workshop that I organised and facilitated; the event started with a commemorative ceremony and with a panel of scholar, delivering a welcoming speech, I was invited to sit in the panel. The second event took place at Gandhi's statue of 'Gandhi Circle', I joined the members of the AAP that were paying a commemorative tribute to Gandhi;
- The AAP State Council and Rajasthan convention, Jaipur 1 February. This convention gathered the AAP members from all over Rajasthan. The event provided an opportunity to meet party members from other places of the state, to hear different perspectives and to meet more people with whom to cooperate. Moreover, this event allowed me to experience the party's internal functioning and to interview a party leader;
- UPMS Workshop, Mumbai 14-16 February. The workshop titled 'Land and Displacement in India' was attended by over 30 scholars and activists working at the grassroots level in the country. The issue discussed during the workshop closely related with the research and UPMS methodology that is part of the research methodological structure;
- Right to Food Conference, Sanand (Ahmedabad), 1-3 March. The conference was organised by scholars and activists working for the rights of marginalised people. This event provided an opportunity to extend knowledge related to the research, strengthen cooperation with the organisers and to meet more scholars and activists;
- Meditation course at Dhamma Thali, Jaipur 18-28 March. Dhamma Thali is a Vipassana Meditation Centre based on the teachings of the Buddha as delivered by Satya Narayan Goenka. The meditation course provided the opportunity to work on the self in a way that was compatible with Gandhian views and methods. The course provided the most rigorous *ashram*-like experience;
- Grassroots politics event, Jaipur 7 April. This event was organised by social moments (coordinated by MKSS) that invited political parties for a debate about political

perspectives for marginalised people. The audience of five or six thousand rural people was given a chance to interact with the parties running for the Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan. The event was an extremely important and relevant learning experience that very closely related with the research. Moreover, it provided a meeting place with many scholars and activists who I met me throughout the research and also it allowed me to meet others that it was not possible to meet before.

Appendix E – List of Interviews carried on in Italy

Here is the full List of people interviewed with details about gender, place, time and the corresponding category to which I assigned them (Senator, MP, Activist, Scholar etc.), as described in the methodology. Among additional information, the profession is indicated as generally as possible and for elected representatives employment preceding the election is referred to.

1. Achille [pseudonym] (Male, Senator, specialised in Human Rights, he gained international experience in the field. Associate of a company providing environmental certification for business production) [first interview public place, Vicenza, 2015-03-09] M5S senator;
2. Basilio [pseudonym] (Male, Municipal representative, ICT expert) [first interview town hall, Parma, 2015-03-10] M5S municipal representative;
3. Carmen [pseudonym] (Female, Activist in Rome, she has an extended knowledge of the movement at the city and national levels. Medical social worker) [first interview public place, Rome 2015-04-16] M5S activist;
4. Giovanni Moro (Male, Professor at the University of 'Roma Tre' he is the president of the Foundation for Active Citizenship) [first interview FONDACA, Rome 2015-04-30] Scholar;
5. Marina Calloni (Female, Professor at the University of Milan) [first interview Sapienza University, Rome 2015-05-06] Scholar;
6. Domenico [pseudonym] (Male, ICT expert) [first interview Italian Senate, Rome 2015-05-14] M5S senator;
7. Elda [pseudonym] (Female, School teacher) [first interview Italian Senate, Rome 2015-05-14] M5S senator;

8. Sandro Mezzadra (Male, Professor at the University of Bologna) [first interview public place, Rome 2015-05-14] Scholar;
9. Folco [pseudonym] (Male, Communication expert) [first interview his office, Latina 2015-05-22] M5S activist;
10. Giacinto [pseudonym] (Male, School teacher) [first interview his house, Latina 2015-05-29] M5S activist;
11. Federico Pistono (Male, ICT expert and entrepreneur, writer and trainer) [first interview Skype 2015-06-01]] – as agreed with Pistono his name is not anonymised because he made his position public – M5S activist;
12. Irene [pseudonym] (Female, Researcher in public foundation) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-06-11] M5S activist;
13. Giacinto and Folco [pseudonyms] [Male and Male, second interview for each of them, public place, Latina 2015-06-12] M5S activists;
14. Raffaele De Mucci (Male, Professor at LUISS University of Rome) [first interview Domus Sessoriana, Rome 2015-06-16] Scholar;
15. Jacopo [pseudonym] (ICT expert, Jacopo was expelled from the M5S) [Male, first interview moving from public to his place and public place again, Rome 2015-06-17] Expelled M5S national MP;
16. Carlo Ruzza (Male, Professor at the University of Trento) [first interview Domus Sessoriana, Rome 2015-06-19] Scholar;
17. Manuel Anselmi (Male, Professor at LUISS University of Rome) [first interview Domus Sessoriana, Rome 2015-06-19] Scholar;
18. Roberto Segatori (Male, Professor at the University of Perugia) [first interview Domus Sessoriana, Rome 2015-06-19] Scholar;
19. Flaminia Saccà (Female, Professor at Tuscia University of Viterbo) [first interview Domus Sessoriana, Rome 2015-06-20] Scholar;
20. Leone [pseudonym] (Male, Civil engineer and business consultant) [first interview public place, Rome 2015-06-25] M5S national MP;
21. Martino and Nadia [pseudonyms] (Male, ICT expert and Female, Translator of scientific publications) [first interview their office, Rome 2015-06-26] M5S activists;

22. Oscar and Pamela [pseudonym] (Male, Civil servant and Female, Employee in private sector; Oscar was expelled from the M5S) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-03] Expelled M5S senator and M5S activist;
23. Fabio Bordignon (Male, Professor at the University of Urbino) [first interview Skype 2015-07-09] Scholar;
24. Romeo [pseudonym] (Male, Civil servant) [first interview Skype 2015-07-09] M5S activist;
25. Samuele [pseudonym] (Male, ICT expert and third sector professional) [first interview Skype 2015-07-14] M5S regional MP;
26. Tullio [pseudonym] (Male, Employee in private sector) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-14] M5S activist;
27. Viola and Ugo [pseudonyms] (Female, Shop keeper and Male, Designer; they abandoned the M5S for disagreement with the political line) [first interview Skype 2015-07-14] M5S former activists;
28. Vasco [pseudonym] (Male, School teacher) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-15] M5S activist;
29. Wilma [pseudonym] (Female, Translator) [first interview Skype 2015-07-17] M5S regional MP;
30. Zeno [pseudonym] (Male, Employee in public sector) [first interview his home, Latina 2015-07-18] M5S activist;
31. Anselmo [pseudonym] (Male, Employee in the private sector) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-18] M5S activist;
32. Fabio De Nardis (Male, Professor at the University of Salento, Lecce) [first interview Skype 2015-07-21] Scholar;
33. Bertoldo [pseudonym] (Male, Employee in private sector) [first interview Skype 2015-07-21] M5S municipal representative;
34. Cecilia [pseudonym] (Female, Entrepreneur) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-21] M5S activist;
35. Ennio [pseudonym] (Male, Artisan) [first interview public place, Latina 2015-07-21] M5S activist;

36. Roberto Biorcio (Male, Professor at the University of Milan) [first interview Skype 2015-07-21] Scholar;
37. Dora [pseudonym] (Female, Lawyer) [first interview Skype 2015-07-28] M5S Euro MP.

Appendix F – List of events attended in Italy

I participated in a number of events considered significant for the research.

- First Congress of the International Association of Social and Human Sciences in Portuguese Language, Lisbon 1-5 February 2015. The researcher presented the paper entitled. 'Political-colonialism: liberal over substantive democracy';
- Conference on Liquid Democracy, Rome 06 March. The M5S representatives at the parliament of the region of Lazio organised this conference to inform and share ideas concerning the introduction of legislation and software infrastructures to enhance e-democracy;
- Meeting of the regional Working-group on Health, Latina 28 March. The M5S representatives at the parliament of the region of Lazio, organised this event to consult with local workers and activists of the health sector in order to monitor and improve the implementation of health policies in Lazio region;
- Conference 'Citizenship Today', Rome 01 April. The conference organised by "Istituto Svizzero" and "Fondazione Basso" with the presence of Étienne Balibar and Pietro Costa;
- Cineforum "La Trattativa", Latina 24 April. Meetup 256 organised the screening of the film-documentary "La Trattativa" for the whole city of Latina. The film describes the negotiation of the Italian state with the mafia that occurred during the first half of the 1990s. At the end of the two programmed screenings of the movie, two debates with the film director, Sabina Guzzanti, took place;
- Summer School: Socio-political crisis and new governance challenges (Rome 15-18 June 2015), followed by International Conference: Globalization and new socio-political trends (Rome 19-20 June 2015), organised by the 'International Sociological Association, Research Committee on Sociotechnics and Sociological practice' and 'Italian Sociological Association-Political Sociology Section'. Most of the debates concerned the issue of Populism and the M5S was a topic of a number of debates.